REWRITING THE “NATION”: TURKMEN LITERACY, LANGUAGE, AND POWER, 1904-2004

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

Language is politically invested, and a speech community's administration of its language and alphabet marks, constructs, defines, and expresses its identity. Among the Turkmen people of Central Asia, language policies and alphabet reforms have epitomized continuous efforts to build a national community in the contexts of the tsarist empire, Soviet rule, and independence. Through an examination of language policy, planning, and reform from the 1904 to 2000, my study contributes a new historical perspective on the formation of Turkmen identity; our knowledge more generally of the role of language in expressing and constructing self throughout the exigencies of various political eras; and advances Eurasian and Soviet historiography by illuminating the often absent Turkmen perspective. This study links Turkmenistan's contemporary efforts at post-Soviet language reforms with the earlier Turkmen lexicographic and orthographic work (especially 1910s-1930s), which laid the foundations for the modern Turkmen identity. As contemporary Turkmen struggle to negotiate a postcolonial identity and sort out their place in the international community, my dissertation's examination of Turkmen language evolution over the last century supplies needed historical context to current language renewal efforts and Turkmen identity construction.
DEDICATION

This “report” would not have been possible without the support of my parents, who had the foresight to send me to Russia as early as 1985. Especially my Mom, who had the courage to accompany me then and to help with massive photocopying and note-taking in the British Public Records Office. Many thanks, and sisterly affection, to Tina and Keith, who at various times provided laughter, company, a room, and solace. Most of all, thank you for giving us Donovan.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Local Histories/Global Designs: Turkmen Alphabet and Language Reform

Turkmenistan entered the twenty-first century amid a fervor of alphabet and language chaos. People went to sleep registered at Улица Первого Мая, but woke up on Göroglý Şaýolu. In January 2000 the government of Turkmenistan began full-scale implementation of a 1993 Presidential decree that Turkmenistan would adopt a Latin-based writing system in place of the Cyrillic alphabet it had used since 1940. It was a radical break with the past. Street signs, like other public texts (newspapers, textbooks, maps, license plates), transformed from a Soviet script and language content to a Turkmen national format. For some citizens, this was the third alphabet of their lifetime. It was the most recent episode in a centuries-long process of reforming the Turkmen language to suit socio-political circumstances and using alphabet to symbolize and define a Turkmen identity.

This policy challenged literacy at the most basic level. Daily tasks of reading the newspaper, understanding the headlines in television news, complying with tax notices, or knowing what the schoolteacher wrote on the board during a parent meeting became serious challenges. This project explores why the state spend time, energy, and money to change this basic facet of life when most adults knew how to read and write in Cyrillic. Concurrent with the 2000 script reform, the government, led by President Saparmyrat Nyýazow, reduced the role of Russian language and raised the status of Turkmen in its place. Most governmental and professional fields had been conducted in Russian during the USSR. The change in

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1 “May 1st Street,” in Russian, a socialist holiday; “Göroglu Avenue,” named for the Turkmen folk hero.
language status forced teachers, journalists, politicians, engineers in the gas and oil
dustries, doctors and scientists to retool their vocabulary and reformulate their discourse in
Turkmen ways. The approximately thirty-percent of the population who were ethnically
non-Turkmen, as well as some Turkmen, who had never studied the Turkmen language,
enrolled in language classes or faced unemployment. Here, I explore why a government
would enact policy that threatened its people’s literacy and ability to function in society.

This study examines the political, cultural, and social contexts in which Turkmen
writing transformed from 1904-2004. This language history illustrates continuities between
pre-revolutionary Russia and the post-1917 Soviet Union, fluidity in center-periphery
relations in the Russian empire, and the complexities of Soviet power, which was not
restricted to a totalitarian system with one-way directions but emerged in manifold
enunciations. For centuries, Turkmen have used forms of language and writing as means for
positioning their local society in, or in opposition to, various global designs. Before the
adoption of Islam, Turkmen, like other Turkic groups, employed a runic script. Since then,
the modern Turkmen language has been written with three different official writing systems
(Arabic-based (c.a. 900-1926), Latin-based (1926-1939), Cyrillic (1939-1993), Latin (1993-
present), with modifications in (1923, 1925, 1928, 1995, 2000). Each alteration
demonstrated the politicization of language either by broad external political forces, such as
Soviet nationalities policy, or internal dissatisfaction over the alphabet's ability to symbolize
Turkmen identity.  

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3 Hezretguly Durdyňew, "Turkmen Milli elpjä: taryh we tejribe," [The Turkmen National Alphabet: History and
Experience] Türkmen Dili, Tuesday, 4 March 2000, p. 2. Despite shortages of funding and paper, the government
created a weekly newspaper in January 2000 specifically to address language issues in the general public.
Decisions about language are frequently guided not by linguistic concerns but extra-code factors and are typically affected by social considerations.4 “Language development” or “language planning,” for example, entails deliberate efforts to shape language via public policy.5 Ideological or political realities demand new usages of language and culture. New functional expectations—for example, an emergent technology or administration of a new state policy—require language to adjust in order to conform to the social demand. Adjustments may include standardization in spelling or grammar, or adoption of a new writing system. In the end, members of the speech community, usually an intellectual or political elite, make efforts to adapt the language to meet social exigencies.6 The history of such efforts is one way that a language reflects the social experiences of a speech community.7

Partha Chaterjee’s term “metanarrative” refers to overarching, broad, or global projects as dominant narratives to which Turkmen respond.8 For the purposes of focusing this study, I examine the Turkmen responses to one metanarrative as they engaged it, contributed to it, and allowed it to shape their society at times, even while they resisted at

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other times. That narrative is literacy specifically the nineteenth and twentieth-century perception that mass literacy was a necessary precursor to a society’s modernization.  

The details of this history illustrate how universal concerns—such as literacy—are addressed at the local level, and how local responses often come to shape the implementation of these global concerns. Language is a particularly useful historical lens here because it has been consistently important to Turkmen. Through this lens we see the intersections of religion, linguistics, politics, power, and center-periphery relations. While Turkmen were at the physical edge of larger concerns such as Turkism, Sovietism, and Jadidism, I locate them at the center of their own experience. Exploring the varying Turkmen responses to mass literacy and education over a longue durée reveals continuity and change over time, especially as they paralleled political eruptions and intellectual breaks.

This case study also has much to say about the general conceptualization of literacy, demonstrating that it is not a constant, but is ever transforming within larger contexts. The place of literacy in the Turkmen history also comments on “creation of meaning.”  

As Turkmen society has evolved, the very definition of “Turkmen” has been reevaluated due to political and social demands. Alphabets have acted as the symbolic expression of such reevaluation. Turkmen use of the Arabic script signified their membership in the Muslim community. This remained, but took on additional meanings to emphasize regional dialect in the 1910s when Turkmen intellectuals added diacritics in order to more accurately reflect the sounds of the spoken language. Likewise, the Cyrillic script symbolized Turkmenistan’s

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association with Soviet power, while the post-Soviet Latin alphabet reflected a rejection of
the Soviet heritage.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a small but influential number of Turkmen came
to believe that literacy was the key to modernity. However, during the following century, in
which becoming modern played out, the definition of literacy changed. Indeed, we may
speak of literacies concerning reading/deconstructing texts and writing/reconstructing
expression across media. Among pre-nineteenth century Turkmen “literate” generally
meant possessing the ability to recite, or “read,” religious texts. In the 1869 Russian Imperial
census, literate meant the ability to sign one’s name. In the late nineteenth century,
progressive activists among Muslims called for an expanded version of knowledge in Central
Asian schools. They proposed a “new method” (usul-i jadid) of schooling based on phonetic
teaching to achieve functional literacy. Called “jadids” (proponents of a new method of
teaching), these intellectual and social leaders did not wish to remove religiosity from
learning. Rather, they wanted Muslims to obtain more general knowledge in combination
with traditional content. In the process of experimenting with this method, social power
shifted from the socially elite, “literate” clergy to the intellectual elites.

Language and alphabet came to reflect the changes in political needs as well as
emphases on aspects of identity. One major argument of this study is that language is rarely
just about words or letters. Rather, these components of language become important means
of identifying the speech community in question. Here, it is the speakers of the Turkmen
language making use of letters and words to locate themselves in the world.

12 Brian Street, Social Literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development of ethnography and education
(New York: Longman, 1995); Harvey Graff, “literacy,” Social Science Encyclopedia, Adam Kuper and Jessica
Cultural power can be a significant agent in determining a society’s historical experience. Identity reflects this power and in turn shapes the forms power takes on. Literacy and schooling are social arenas capable of reflecting such power and identity. In the case of the Turkmen, the history of four alphabets in less than one hundred years chronicles Turkmen perceptions and expressions of self. The systems of writing, the shape of the letters and the various scripts employed, signified a cultural emphasis. And, that meaning contained in signs and the discourse surrounding each alphabet reform, revealed how that particular emphasis spoke to Turkmen identity.13 The details of each script change represent choices in authority, power, resistance, and cultural expression.

In the years 1904 to 2004 various Turkmen elites brought social policy in line to support the idea that enlightenment via literacy was the key to building a modern society. Over the century in which this plays out, indigenous concepts melded with western practices and influences from Islam to create a Turkmen approach to knowledge that reflected both conscious choices and general global influences. Alphabet became an important means of identifying self in the many worlds that Turkmen held membership. As a result, forms of alphabet became predicated on how they wanted to define themselves. While the Turkmen identity was neither static nor immutable there were continuous concepts and themes, most importantly that of Türkmençilik.

Turkmen Identity/ Türkmençilik

Turkmen are part of the ethno-linguistic Turkic continuum that stretches from western China to western Turkey. They share a claim to western-Turkic (Oguz) heritage

along with Azerbaijanis and Turks in Turkey.\footnote{Oguz was originally a political term referring to members of the 6-8\textsuperscript{th} c. A.D. Gök Türk empire on the Chinese border, whose name is attributed to an eponymous leader Oguz. It is also the name modern scholars apply to the family of south-western Turkic dialects. Oguz arrived in the west after disturbances in Mongolia set off a chain reaction that led Turkic tribes across the steppe in search of pasturage. See, Peter Golden, “The Migrations of the Oguz,” \textit{Archivum Ottomanicum} 4 (1972), p. 47-81. On Oguz transformation into Seljuks see Gary Leiser, ed., \textit{A History of the Seljuks} (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).} Despite a distinct twenty-first century identity, Turkmen culture and traditions historically overlapped with that of other Turks. The term “Turkic” refers to this cultural and linguistic heritage that all Turkic-language speaking groups share.\footnote{That is, the people who speak a Turkic language found primarily in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tatarstan and parts of Russia, and Western China.} Nevertheless, a separate Turkmen sense of identity was born out of their particular historical experience.\footnote{British records at the Public Record Office and British Museum have greatly influenced my understanding of Turkmen tribal relations, leadership roles, and interaction with major powers in the late-Tsarist period, see bibliography.} A nomadic heritage, distinctively Oguz dialects, and tribal traditions contribute greatly to the identity that sets Turkmen apart from other Turkic groups and shape a specifically Turkmen sense of ethnic identity.\footnote{Edgar, 2004, offers an interesting and well thought out introduction to early Turkmen history in which she emphasizes the genealogical claims to Turkmen-ness. Her article “Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-1929,” \textit{Russian Review}, Vol. 62, No. 1, January 2003, pp. 132-149, also offers a rich source for understanding Turkmen identity.}

In the coalescence of modern Turkmen identity discourses arise in which Turkmen claim centrality in their historical experience, despite their location at the periphery of major powers such as Iran or Russia.\footnote{Mignolo, 2000, p. 5.} "Türkmençilik," or “Turkmen-ness,” is an enduring cultural claim in that refers to “the quality of being genuinely Turkmen.”\footnote{Allen Frank and Jeren Touch-Werner, \textit{Turkmen-English Dictionary} (Kensington, MD: Dunwoody Press, 1999), p. 551} A term that describes the Turkmen “essence,” it encompasses the habits, customs, rituals, and duties that an individual should follow to be a “good Turkmen.”\footnote{Though he misunderstood the term as two separate words, “Turcoman chilik,” Colin Thubron’s does accurately relate the idea of \textit{Türkmençilik} in \textit{The Lost Heart of Asia} (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 10.} The phrases \textit{Türkmençilikde beyle edilmeyär} (It is not done so in Turkmenichilik) or \textit{Türkmençilige laýyk gelmeyär} (That does not accord with Turkmenchilik) illustrate the quotidian nature of the concept to this day. They refer to a
general behavior guided by custom, including, for example, the proper way to sit, the manner in which a child should greet an elder, or spiritual practices.

Turkmenistan’s 1992 Constitution demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the idea of Türkmençilik, designed to clarify the character of the nation, without actually employing the term. It also makes crystal clear that the new nation will be Turkmen in nature, not Russian. The Constitution reads,

Turkmenistan [recognizes the need] to successfully renew the Turkmen national culture, spread comprehension of the significance of [Turkmenistan’s] own nationality, refresh folk customs, and widen the usage of Turkmen as the state language.21

Language, speaking and writing in Turkmen, is fundamental to Türkmençilik.

According to tradition, a Turkmen who does not know his or her mother tongue is not a true Turkmen. This theme runs throughout the sources employed in this study. Although in some years the Muslim nature of Turkmen identity is stressed and in others the composition of the modern Turkmen nation is underscored, the spoken language contributes greatly to the definition of being Turkmen. Turkmen heartily recognize their shared Turco-Islamic heritage, but have privileged their Turkmen-ness, often seeking out cultural peculiarities to distinguish themselves from other Turkic groups.22

Türkmençilik binds the group, but it is expressed with more than one voice. At a given moment in time an individual or sub-group may wish to underscore Turkmen membership in the Muslim community, the former Soviet states, or the cohort of Caspian Sea energy producers. In summer 2005, President Nyýazow attempted to de-emphasize

Turkmenistan’s place among the former Soviet republics by reducing its status in the Commonwealth of Independent States. This emphasized a more globally, rather than former-Soviet-oriented Turkmenistan, as in 1995 when the country joined the United Nations. Such enunciations of Turkmen-ness are clear, but they often compete over emphasis, symbolism, or expression of positionality within the larger world order. In recognizing this we make ourselves more sensitive to the many voices that compete to define Turkmen.

**Tribal identity and national cohesion**

In the pre-modern period, Turkmen lived a semi-nomadic life-style. They represented a great number of tribes and clans who displayed little tendency toward political unification. Rather they followed a hierarchical leadership system, placed great importance on the family structure and ancestor worship, and vied with each other for the natural resources of their lands. These tendencies were strengthened by the Turkmens’ early modern history when tribes were further distanced as they came to be incorporated into the territories of states such as Khiva, Bukhara, and Iran. Then in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Turkmen became part of the lands of the Russian empire/USSR, Iran, and Afghanistan.23

The ethnic Turkmen identity took on a stronger national identity under Soviet era policies such as *korenizatsiia*24 and the promotion of titular republican identities. Another wave of

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23 According to the Russian Imperial Census of 1897, Turkmen speakers in Transcaspia numbered 281,400. The principalities of Khiva and Bukhara were not counted at that time. They were included in the 1926 Soviet Census, which according to language counted 426,700 Turkmen, according to nationality, 427,600. Richard Pipes, *Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 300-301. *Obzor Zakaspiiskii Oblast* also contains statistics on demographics.

“Turkmenification” built up during Gorbachev’s glasnost. Soviet policies laid the foundation for the nationalism of the 1990s as nationalist movements throughout the USSR grew out of Soviet era identity policies while others rebelled against the policies that had defined them.

There is a long history of tribal separation among Turkmen that overshadows more recent examples of cohesion. This fractured political history became one of the driving forces behind President Nyýazow’s intense nation-building efforts. The many tribes and clans retained their cultural and linguistic identities. Individuals are usually knowledgeable about their tribal heritage and that of their neighbors. Traditional values remain strong. Nyýazow took advantage of this situation. For example, many Turkmen believed that without a strong leader the country could descend into tribal discord. Nyýazow has capitalized on this, creating a paternalistic regime that takes advantage of Turkmens’ respect for authority figures. His various titles reflect his shrewdness: Türkmenbaşy [head of the Turkmen] makes him the nation’s father figure; Serdar [leader with military overtones] is invoked to remind the nation that he is their leader; and Ilk ömrüligi prezidenti [first president, for life] places him into the historic category of men like George Washington, with Caesarean overtones.


26 Turkmen and Tatars, for example, have remained peaceful and have built upon their Soviet experiences, while Chechens and Tajiks fell into warfare, in part due to backlash against Soviet identity and borders.
Power

This case study sheds light on the history of power as well as literacy. Over the century examined here, power appeared in a variety of guises, and so did resistance. While some intellectuals sought cooperative approaches to progressive development, others, like the basmachi, continued to resist physically. The Turkmen Arabic alphabet was a site for struggle (müjadele) over ideological dominance. It was not tanks that rolled into Ashabat, but the Russian alphabet. The Cyrillic script, by contrast, marked a new nexus in Turkmen enunciation that suppressed both the Islamic and Turkic components to support the centralization of Soviet power.

Neither language, nor learning is politically or culturally neutral. Language is a realm in which power and expression of self are negotiated. Indeed, language and literacy do not exist outside of power structures. Alphabets are determined by whoever is in power, whether that be political, cultural, demographic, religious, or economic. The 1923 Arabic script reform reflected the Turkmen assertion of their Turkic identity. It was not a rejection of their Muslim-ness (müsulmançylyk), although it did reposition the self to privilege Turkic-ness (Türklük). The Cyrillic script, by contrast, marked a new nexus in Turkmen enunciation that suppressed both the Islamic and Turkic components to support a new Soviet identity.

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Post-Soviet alphabet and language reforms reasserted a Turkmen identity and underscored an anti-Soviet stance.

In the early Soviet period, Turkic elites wrestled with how to define Turks. Azerbaijanis became an alternative authority to Moscow in deciding how the Turkic community would be defined via language. But such struggles are rarely two-way. Rather, multiple entities struggle for configurations of power. One method for gaining power is to reduce others’ access to it. Nineteenth century jadids challenged the authority of traditional Muslim clergy by expanding the social meanings of literacy and transforming access to knowledge. President Nyýazow likewise claimed legitimacy of his post-Soviet rule through the semiotics of sovereignty (flag, anthem, and alphabet) while members of society resisted by avoiding the new Turkmen alphabet. In the early post-Soviet years, language and education reform would be among the greatest social concerns of Turkmenistan’s citizenry. Some were empowered while others were disempowered due to language skills or access to education.

Islam

The important social and cultural role of Islam is embedded in each of the political eras addressed in this study. Religion was a key aspect of late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century reformists (jadids). In fact, they hoped to “save” Islam through modernization. Although the Soviet government promoted atheism, Islam did not disappear after 1917. But the mechanisms for manipulating its message and related social powers changed. Mosques were not eliminated entirely, but the state reduced the number substantially from near 200 to
4. Only a handful of Central Asian medreses (Islamic colleges) operated legally to train Turks in reading Islamic texts. In the Soviet period, literacy was secularized. From 1929-1939 a Latin-based script replaced the Arabic writing system of Muslim groups, after which Moscow imposed Cyrillic alphabets in 1940. On the surface, Latinization removed religious symbolism from writing, but it simultaneously marked each of the written languages as “Muslim” for the Soviet state would not have targeted groups for Latinization had they not been Muslim.

The post-Soviet government’s attitudes toward religion wavered between strict suppression to making allowances provided there were state controls. Mosques sprang up around Turkmenistan after the independence of 1991. Some of these even housed medreses. However, that level of organization, albeit for non-political, spiritual practice, threatened the state’s sense of security and in the early 2000s medreses were restricted. The post-Soviet government did not want even groups of children learning to read the Koran. Such activities did not cease, but moved underground or became discreet. Because traditional Turkmen education was in part tied to the texts of Islam, the state’s treatment of religious groups affected learning and literacy. The state did not oppress Islam but rather coopted its spaces, teachers, and concepts using them to support Nyýazow’s visions and the cult of personality that grew up around him.

*The literacy myth*

These chapters also raise questions about the uses of “myths” of literacy and the “myths” of alphabets as Turkmen attempted to fit aspects of their society into broader

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patterns of global ideas. Jadids believed that education and literacy were keys to modernity, while the qadimçi (traditionalists) saw change as a threat to social structures and Islam itself. The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was a time when Muslims around the world debated and experimented with forms of modernity. These debates were part of larger global visions of the importance of literacy to modern society. Turks’ belief in west European ideas of hierarchical notions of backwardness reflected in literacy rates reflects an inculcation of colonialism in Turkmen even though it demoted them. The Turkmen absorbed the western myths, focusing on schools and literacy as conduits to Turkmen modernity.

Bolsheviks shared basic ideals about the role of literacy with jadids, albeit within a different ideological framework. This overlap in expectations of literacy and enlightenment led to a period of cooperation between local and central efforts that stretched into the 1930s. Chapters two and three explore competition and cooperation among elites over how social arenas, such as schools and customs, were employed to promote political objectives among Turkmen in Imperial Russia and then in the Soviet Union. But, this overlap existed only so far because each group adhered to different definitions of literacy, modernity, and education. The change in the political atmosphere and the purges of the 1930s, which thrived on the carcasses of a decapitated intelligentsia, reflected the limited correlation of jadid and

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32 Harvey Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the nineteenth century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991). The ideas derived from western societies, but Turkmen viewed them as global, even Muslim, because these notions arrived via other Muslim groups. Azeris, Ottomans, Tatars and Uzbeks played important roles.


Bolshevik ideals. The groups had all agreed that literacy was key, but ultimate goals, processes, and especially ideas about who would make the decisions differed significantly.

*The alphabet myth*

Soviet era literacy campaigns maintained the notion that alphabetic literacy was a foundation for enlightenment and progress. Chapter three illustrates that Moscow also stressed the fundamental importance of “political literacy.” As political or cultural powers shifted and transformed, various sectors of Turkmen society used education, literacy, and writing systems, to inculcate a socialist outlook in the masses. One could not function in Soviet society without at least rudimentary understanding of how to employ Marxism-Leninism socially, whether it was in the classroom, the preface of a scholarly work, or a parade. The underlying ideas concerning literacy as a path to enlightenment and a modern society persisted throughout the Soviet era.35

Socialist paradigms, combined with the extremism of Stalinism and Sovietization often obscured the fact that the Soviet aim had been to create a perfected, modern, even utopian, society. Tamara Iusupovna Krasovitskaia argues that Soviet policies were not designed simply to oppress national minorities. Rather, Moscow aimed to produce a modern, literate society. The Soviet government did promote the primacy of Russian, but it did not quash local cultures and languages as simply as some nationalists have contended.36

35 Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 23, 83, discusses campaigns that focused on eradicating the veil, brideprice, polygyny, underage marriage, as well as illiteracy in the process of modernizing Central Asia. In Turkmenistan, the veil was not as common, so it was not an issue as it was in Uzbekistan. See also, Adrienne Edgar, “Emancipation of the Unveiled: Turkmen Women under Soviet Rule, 1924-1929,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1, January 2003, pp. 132-149.

language policy adapted to the demands of broader policies. In the 1920s and especially
the 1930s Moscow endeavored to provide education, and a modern alphabet, to every ethnic
group. The Soviets believed, not unlike some in the nineteenth century, that the struggle
against illiteracy could best be carried out in native tongues. Korenizatsiia aimed to develop
local languages and build national cadres, but logistical problems and the sheer volume of
resources it took to locate and train teachers in every ethnic language compounded political
challenges and ended the program.

Local dialects, regional languages, and Russian at times vied for dominance while at
other times amicably co-existed, in Turkmenistan as well as throughout the USSR. This
meant that the languages in which people learned to read and write gained or lost currency
according to political standards. Identity too was closely linked to the politics of language.
Local sentiment reflecting frustration with the status of Russian was based less on the
republic-wide use of Russian, and more on its dominance in official arenas. Calls for parity
between national languages and Russian were focused more on language status and prestige
than on actual daily usage. Appeals for change in the status of Turkmen during glasnost’
and after 1991 bore witness to the fact that the symbolic place of language and alphabet was
just as important as actual language usage.

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37 Jacob Ornstein, “Soviet Language Policy: Continuity and Change,” Ethnic Minorities in the Soviet Union,
Erich Goldhagen ed. (N.Y.: Praeger, 1968), p. 121; Theresa Rakowska-Harmstone, Russia and nationalism in
Central Asia: The Case of Tajikistan (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 242; Michael G.
Smith, Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953 (Belin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998);
Audrey L. Altstadt, Culture Wars, manuscript.
38 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 350 discusses plans for Kurds in Turkmenistan; O nachal’noi i srednei shkole
postanovlenie TsK KP(b)T “O vypolnenii direktiv po nachal’noi i srednei shkole” ot 5 sentiabria 1933
(Aşqabat, Tırkmenpartneşir, 1999) discusses educational conditions for ethnic minorities (az milletler) in
Turkmenistan, including Russians. A more detailed study of this topic appears in chapter 3 above.
39 RGASPI, f. 62, o. 2, d. 945, l.1-26. For a general discussion see Simon Crisp, “Soviet Language Planning
40 In 1987, Taçmyradow wrote that a Russian-Turkmen dictionary published for school children was needed
because those who studied in Turkmen schools were severely deficient in their knowledge of Russian. T.
Chapter four examines language politics, schooling, and the influence of national identity on literacy practices from the 1950s through 1999. A language conference in 1954 reveals the perceived importance of language content in representing a socialist state. Reforms in the 1980s allowed ordinary citizens to publicly discuss their positions on language status. The era of Mikhail Gorbachev’s rule made space for demands for cultural autonomy that led to a re-evaluation of the role of the Russian language vis-à-vis local languages. Debate over which would be the language of instruction in schools, in each of the Soviet regions, represented a continuity of language considerations found in earlier eras. The nationalities of the USSR saw language as indicative of national identity and laid claim to official use in order to emphasize a political orientation, such as nationalism in Lithuania or pro-Russian stance in Belarus.

After gaining independence in 1991, several Turkmen citizens called for a repeal of Soviet influences, including forms of writing and learning, to support a national identity. While intellectuals, teachers, parents and state administrators attempted to work out the details of reform, the President Nyýazow usurped the authority to choose ways of knowing. Chapter five discusses the late 1990s and early 2000s when President Saparmyrat Niýyazow took control over the appearance of the alphabet, content of textbooks, parameters of public speech, and content of academic research in Turkmenistan. Inspired by the power of information technology in the world, he formulated an alphabet that he believed would suit computers. Nyýazow developed a cult of personality around himself that pervaded public expression in newspapers, television, statues, and signage. Just a few years later, an intensification in the nationalism and the Nyýazow’s role in public, verbal, and visual discourse turned Turkmenification into Nyýazowization. By 2004, Turkmen citizens could
employ or express their alphabetic, political, and cultural literacies only within the parameters of Nyýazow’s nation-building policies.

A World History Perspective

In the context of a Wallersteinian world system, in which the “core” survives economically at the expense of a “periphery,” Turkmen occupy a peripheral space and the world political economy keeps them there. This study contributes to an examination of experiences from the local perspective, taking into account culture and the colonial experience, rather than from the core’s perspective. In the process, we see the interpenetrative relationship between local histories and global designs. This expanded interpretation of concepts that are usually viewed at odds with one another (culture/power, center/periphery, Muslim/non-Muslim, east/west) reveals dynamic complexities. In refocusing agency conceptually from the “center” to a “periphery” and drawing out the Turkmen voices, we relocate the Turkmen, who have often lived at the periphery of great

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41 Empirical and theoretical studies in the field of World History help to shape the analytical framework of this study. It is not enough to think of Turkmen as “Muslim” or to depict former Soviet countries as linked solely by their communist experience, but is necessary to see culture and social change within the context of epistemological influences. Immanual Wallerstein and Ferdnand Braudel laid the groundwork in this field. The Subaltern School, including Partha Chaterjee and Gayan Spivak, challenged World History’s metanarrative and asked scholars to read history against the grain in order to draw out the voices of the less powerful historical actors. Walter Mingolo and Elizabeth Hill Boone demonstrated how writing can act as a medium for investigating cultures and coloniality. In the process, they seek to redefine "writing" to include non-alphabetic and such non-written texts as quipu. Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo, eds. Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). Jeremy Bently, Michael Adas, and Arif Dirlik contrast Eurocentrism with writing “World History” to reflect broader interpretations of global history. David Christian, Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History (Berkely: California University Press, 2004) expands temporal conceptualizations of history to include “big history,” or a wholistic approach to time. Walter Mignolo expands the epistemology of historical actors with the concept “loci of enunciation.” The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

powers, to the center of their own experience. The periphery actually becomes centered. Historical legacy and space are brought together in the term “loci of enunciation.”

The loci of enunciation are the many perspectives, varied horizons, epistemologies, historical and cultural legacies, and social identities that make up the voices with which a subject speaks of itself. Turkmen today speak of themselves not only as a post-Soviet, Muslim people, but also one with an Imperial Russian legacy, one that has striven for modernity, one that has a nomadic heritage, and one that today operates as a Caspian Sea power. These enunciations are found not only in verbal discourse or written texts, but also in the semiotics of the Turkmen culture. Here, Turkmen history is not a minor part of global macronarratives, or peripheral to world events, but rather is at the meeting grounds of many forces. Simultaneously, while demonstrating the uniqueness of Turkmen culture and history, this approach illustrates that the tiny Turkmen population has shared many experiences with other societies.

This analytical framework includes a “spatial dimension” that considers the epistemological as well as physical spaces in which global designs “meet local histories.” This has bearing on our conceptualization of center/periphery relations. Depictions of power centers and peripheries as necessarily antagonistic, for example, as a “dialectic of power and resistance,” are too limited to depict historical realities. Center/periphery, local/global are not by definition at odds or in competition. There is the possibility for cooperation,

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44 A Turkmen woman identifies herself as Teke or Yomut by the patterns of embroidery on her dress and leggings. Her headscarf is tied to tell an on-looker whether she is married, which tribe she belongs to, and the region whence she hails. Her spoken dialect, both pronunciation and word choice, act as similar markers.
45 Mignolo, 2000, pg. ix.
negotiation, even alliance. Broadening the perspective to consider the complexity of human interaction illuminates the intersections of powers.

Within such a vast historical framework what can non-specialists infer from something as specific as Turkmen alphabet reform? By adding a cultural dimension to the traditional Wallersteinian framework and examining the many perspectives or voices that come from the subject over time, we gain a sense of the subject. As the fragments of society enunciate perspectives, they position themselves in the historical and contemporary patterns in the world. The phrase “loci of enunciation” refers to this positioning. It encapsulates epistemological, temporal, and spatial expressions of self.

A crucial dimension of this dissertation is the emphasis on events that were important to the Turkmen, rather than to Eurocentric historiography. My study is not limited to the process or experience of colonialism. Nor is it limited to the Sovietization of Turkmen people. Therefore, it does not rely solely on either of the theoretical frameworks typically applied to these historiographies. I do not presume to offer the only method for organizing historical studies of Turkmen. Rather, I accentuate that loci of enunciation are constantly renewed and reformulated through individual and collective experiences.

This dissertation’s organization underscores the significance of writing in each of the political eras. Chronologically arranged chapters reflect the order of script reforms and the policies that surrounded language planning. The questions addressed in this work reflect the interdisciplinary approach the subject demands. It also attempts to inform policy debates by providing a historical context for language, education, and alphabet policies.
CHAPTER 2

The ABCs of Modernity: Turkmen Literacy and Jadidism, 1904-1926

In discussions of culture, in any country, the first thing to be cited is the level of literacy among the people. This is, of course, natural. It would be meaningless to talk about raising culture among a people with a low level of literacy.47

This chapter examines the efforts of a small group of educated Turkmen to reconcile their cultural and religious heritage with modernity through “new methods” of education and alphabet reform in late-imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union. In it I argue that the intellectual and social “struggles” (mücadele) of jadids, as these reformers became known, were as important to the shaping of Soviet Turkmen identity as were Soviet policies.48 It also details Turkmen exploration of “enlightenment,” which would continue over the next century. This period in Turkmen history represents an era when Turkmen cultural leaders and educators had a great deal of freedom to explore modernity and ways of locating Turkmen culture in the modernizing world. With these aims in mind, jadids chose to join other Turkic groups (Tatars, Uzbeks) in defining literacy as a panacea for social deficiencies. In the process of promoting mass literacy, they seized upon alphabet reform as a means of expediting learning and as a means of reflecting their group identity or Türkmençilik.

Though they had a nomadic tradition and pervasive oral culture, the Turkmen intellectuals sought to incorporate aspects of modernity, such as written texts and literacy,

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48 In Türkmen, the term “täzeçiler” is used more than the Arabic term “jadid,” “ziyalilar” (enlightened ones), or more common throughout Turkestan “taraqqiparwar” (proponents of progress). See Khalid, 1998, pp. 93, 107-08.
while preserving their religious and ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{49} Using the term müjadele—“struggle” this handful of Turkmen identified “enlightenment” (bilim) as the key to modernizing the Turkmen community. Reconfiguring knowledge of the world, logic, ways of knowing and expressing the self the simultaneously experimented with modifications to their Arabic script in the belief that full expression of the spoken word in the written language would expedite learning.\textsuperscript{50} Written language became pivotal to Turkmen self-expression while the details of language content, alphabets, and even punctuation symbolized the speech community’s positioning of itself within the global order.

Throughout the past century, Turkmen intellectuals sought to situate their Türkmençilik (Turkmen-ness/self) within cultural paradigms learned from Islamic, Russian, and western communities, even while striving to protect their traditional identity. In the late nineteenth-century, in great part as a result of Russian conquest, Turkmen recognized that the world around them was changing as they encountered the forces of “modernity”—that complex of economic, political, and cultural changes that evolved initially in Western Europe but quickly reverberated throughout the rest of the world with European imperial domination.\textsuperscript{51} While modernity is an amorphous and highly contested term among scholars,\textsuperscript{52} educated Turkmen conceptualized it in a Turco-Muslim way that shaped their collective responses to global change.


\textsuperscript{50} Tagangeldi Täçmyradow, Türkmen edebi diliniň Soviet Döwründe ösüşi we normalanyş (Aşgabat, Ylym, 1984).


\textsuperscript{52} Gregory Jusdanis, Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Prasajit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning
Small numbers of educated Turks in the Russian Empire embraced the nineteenth-century idea that mass literacy was a necessary precursor to modernity. This idea grew out of conversations taking place in the larger (international) Muslim community (umma). Medreses, for example, acted as sites of cultural and intellectual exchange where Muslims from around the world could meet and communicate ideas. Turkmen developed their understanding of reform and modernity through the influence of newspapers, itinerant teachers, and students who had studied abroad. That is, they defined modernizing as synthesizing local traditions with customs and values seen in other societies, such as the Tatars and the Ottomans. The printing press allowed ideas to be disseminated broadly throughout the Islamic world. For example, Tatars traveling from the Caucasus, via Persia, brought Turkish newspapers to Turkmen urban centers like Merv (today Mary). During the 1910s many Turks were actively publishing politically or socially oriented poems, polemics and literature. The Persian/Turkmen newspaper Ruzmane-i Mavera-i Bahr-i Hazar was more commonly referred to by its Russian name Zakaspiiskaia Tuzemnaia (although it was not printed in Russian) not only published works that addressed the issues of reform, it also employed the reformed “jadid script,” a modified version that added vowels to increase
intelligibility. That is, it was printed in a modified Arabic alphabet that attempted to depict the Turkmens speech.57

Growing dissatisfaction with the formal education available in Central Asia—traditional Islamic schools, mekteb (elementary) and medrese (secondary), and Russian-sponsored tuzemnye (native) schools—prompted activists throughout the Muslim world to advocate a “new method” of phonetic of teaching as the first step in modernization.58 The term jadid, deriving from the Arabic “usul-i jadid”, describes individuals who wished to reform Islamic cultural and social institutions through new [jadid] “methods” [usul] of teaching and socialization in western-style classrooms. Inherent in this social transformation was a challenge to tradition; indeed, the very experience made the concept of tradition possible. It was the social structure and the traditional elite’s hold on power they challenged, not Islam itself. These reformers wished to maintain Islamic heritage and Turkmen ethnic identity, but sought ways to improve society in order to meet the demands of the modern world.59 Though these Turks wished to modernize society and borrow social constructs from other cultures—such as universal education and methods of schooling—they sought to preserve their ethno-religious heritage. Jadids prescribed enlightenment—literacy—as the cure to the social sickness they identified among the people.

While western scholars have expressed doubt about any Turkmen’s participation in the jadid movement,60 this chapter argues not only that there were Turkmen jadids, but also that those Turkmen who had been educated as jadids in other Turkic areas returned home.

57 Söýegow, unpublished manuscript, p. 155. Because few copies of this periodical remain, I rely heavily on the work of Turkmen scholars who have had access to archives and the papers of Turkmen jadids. The Turkmen state archives remain closed to foreigners.
eager to transfer their knowledge to the next generation of Turkmen. Their experiences in the larger Turkic world led *jadids* to draw a connection between language and *Türkmençilik* (Turkmen identity) and to imbue the choice of alphabet with the power to represent a choice of associations in the larger world. Because the new method relied on alphabetic literacy and a phonetic method of teaching the alphabet played a crucial role in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Accurate representation of the Turkmen spoken dialect became key to the Turkmens’ writing in the Arabic script. A particular point of concern was long vowel representation. In modern speech, long vowels or diphthongs are peculiar to Turkmen. Why should the Turkmen have been bothered over such a small detail when there was so much work to do toward basic literacy? The detail of uniqueness was precisely the point. Denotation of long vowels in writing became a way to chronicle Turkmen identity alphabetically. It was one local response to the universal consideration of literacy.

In contrast to studies that see pre-1917 and post-1917 as distinct experiences, my interpretation illustrates continuities between the two political eras. The importance of literacy, alphabet and education not only continued on into the Soviet period but also involved the same *jadid*-educated Turkmen who had worked on social and cultural reform in the late-imperial period. Indeed, in the Soviet period, the *jadid* reformers found themselves in a position to continue their efforts within the new socialist framework. Although they were only a small number of men Turkmen *jadids* became important on the Soviet cultural

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61 The details of this linguistic peculiarity are found in the works of Soviet linguists, but even more clearly presented in the work of Professor Nicolas Poppe, *Introduction to Altaic Linguistics* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1965).

front as they sought accommodation with Soviet policy. Rather than resist Soviet power, as basmachis had, these jadids sought to harness Soviet energy for their own goals. With Soviet power came new hierarchies and bureaucracy but Turkmen cultural workers turned this to their advantage by using the system to further their own work to improve education and increase alphabetic literacy. The Turkmen Bilim Heýaty, founded in 1921 to standardize the writing system, is one example of a merger of how Turkmen intellectuals negotiated space for their concerns within the new Soviet political situation. Despite political challenges, the Turkmen intellectuals’ commitment to enlightenment is a theme that runs throughout this dissertation.

In most respects, this dissertation agrees with Adrienne Edgar’s analysis of Soviet Turkmen history, which argues that “the discourse of Turkmen nationhood in the 1920s and 1930s was shaped in large measure by the intersection of indigenous concepts of identity with the new understandings of nationhood introduced by the Bolsheviks.”63 Edgar’s study aims to demonstrate that the axiom of Moscow’s total power in a “divide and rule” style control has been overstated and the role of the local participants underemphasized. She too identifies Turkmen-ness as a defining aspect of modern Turkmen nationhood, suggesting that Turkmen had developed a “protonationalism.”64 Where my study differs is in the emphasis on the role of jadidism among Turkmen and the idea that it was in the pre-Soviet (jadid) era that Türkmençilik included language as a marker of identity.65 Edgar writes, “Turkmen elites willingly adopted the Soviet emphasis on language as a critical component of national

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identity.” This is true, but it had entered the discourse on self and modernity long before 1917.

In contrast, the Turkmen scholar Myratgeldi Söýegow sees jadid influence long after 1917.66 Disputing Soviet literature that sees 1917 as a divider between periods of literature, he insists that the real shift took place only after 1930. He argues that it took ten to fifteen years for Turkmen to learn and accept Communist ideology. Thus, he identifies many Turkmen literary works of the first decade of Soviet rule as “jadid literature.” For example, more than 10 years after the Revolution, in 1928, Berdi Kerbabaev wrote “Garşa Guda” in Türkmen Medeniýeti.67 Katerina Clark argues similarly in the case of Russia:

Most of the apparently distinctive trends and changes in Soviet intellectual life which marked the period from October 1917 to around 1921 represent the continuation or implementation of policies and movements which originated (usually within the intelligentsia) in the pre-Revolutionary period. Thus they cannot be described as being in some way either radically new or intrinsically Soviet. In some instances, the phenomenon in question was already being planned or even in force in the tsarist period…68

I agree with Söýegow’s general definition of jadidism: employment of the “new method” of teaching.69 Still, I see the 1920s as a period of merger and cooperation rather than a simple extension of jadidism. Certainly jadid ideas and schooling influenced the men who became Turkmenistan’s literati, professors, and leading progressives. But these individuals were also exposed to socialism and great influences from Russia. Educational institutions played an important role in disseminating such ideas. Alongside traditional Islamic mektebs and medreses a network of Russian tuzemnye (native) schools developed

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66 Currently Professor of Turkmen language and literature at the International Turkmen-Turk University, he was formerly the Minister of Education, and the lead academic in post-Soviet alphabet reform.
69 I obtain my understanding of his position not only through his publications, but also through many discussions we have had since 1997.
throughout Central Asia. In fact, the most prominent Turkmen proponent of *jadidism*, Muhammed Geldiew, himself a graduate of the most progressive *medrese* (Galiya in Ufa) completed all of his work on alphabet and education reform within Soviet administrative bodies. Recognizing the degree of negotiated cooperation that took place between *jadid* and socialist ideals is especially important for understanding the severity of the rupture the purges created in the 1930s.

19th century Education for Muslims in the Russian Empire

In the 1897 census, the Russian government estimated Turkmen literacy to be at 0.7%. Locals and Russian administrators alike blamed this low number on the traditional Turkistani educational system: the social power held by the *ulema* (clergy) as teachers, the authority over knowledge that clergy held, and the teaching techniques that they used in traditional Islamic *mektebs*. The general content of instruction, especially rote memorization of sacred texts rather than functional literacy, was considered the greatest culprit. In the end a student was disciplined in *adab/edep* (Islamic theory and etiquette), but had little formal education. Most Turkmen children attended *mektebs* (elementary school). Russian government schools, or *tuzemnye*, were also an educational option for the Turkmen, although few attended them. An increasing number of educated Turkmen felt that neither system could serve their children.

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In a world where literacy was becoming the first marker of modernity, progressive Turks perceived traditional Turkistani education to be “deficient.”\textsuperscript{73} It must be underscored that this story is very much concerned with perceptions. Official documents lead me to suspect that many more girls may have received education than some sources imply. Not only were the numbers higher than I anticipated, but also there is reason to believe that, due to the gender divisions inherent to that society, school inspectors and other men could have known about women who taught girls informally or in their homes.\textsuperscript{74} As with each of the eras of education/language reform discussed in this study, the role of perception and reigning ideology was as important as the actual situation in schools.\textsuperscript{75}

Tatars and Uzbeks had spearheaded social and educational reforms while adopting modern Western styles of theater, publishing, or education via the Russian colonial system.\textsuperscript{76} They provided models for the Turkmen to follow, encouraging them to preserve their religious and ethnic identity, while engaging facets of modern life. Turkmen then targeted the mekteb as arena in which to initiate their own reforms.

\textit{Mektebs: Traditional Islamic Education}

Mektebs as elementary schools and medreses as secondary schools aimed to impart an Islamic education or terbiye (upbringing/education) that schooled children in the basic principles of Islamic education and social relations. Elementary school teachers were

\textsuperscript{73} Muratgeldi Söyegov, Türkmen Edbiyatında Ceditçilik Dönemi hakkında Bazı Tesbitler ve Yeni Malumatlar,” \textit{bilig}, 7, güz, 1998, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{74} Marianne Kamp, “The Otin and the Soviet School: The End of Traditional Education for Uzbek Girls.” Paper presented to the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, 1996.
\textsuperscript{75} Ottomans spoke of reforming schools, and teaching literacy, as early as the 1840s, but did not shift the responsibility for elementary education from the şeyh ül-Islam to the minister of education until 1914. Carter Vaughn Findley, \textit{Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 130-172; Niyazi Berkes, \textit{The Development of Secularism in Turkey} (Montreal, 1964), pp. 400-16.
\textsuperscript{76} Adeeb Khalid, 1998.
members of the clergy, who the community recognized as educated men: mollas, ishans, and ahuns.\textsuperscript{77} Clergy did not receive training in pedagogy as later professional teachers would. In addition to their duties in the mekteb, they were responsible for performing life-cycle rituals at weddings, funerals, births, and holidays.

When studying with a teacher, students sat on the floor in a half-circle with the instructor in the center. In this configuration, an instructor’s taýak or stick could reach each student, disciplining and encouraging them. Most of the time though, students studied their lessons and made progress individually without the teacher’s oversight; older students may have helped younger students too. Texts included the Koran and other religious books that introduced the basics of the theory and practice of Islam.

Religious endowments (waqf; awqaf, pl.)\textsuperscript{78} provided communal social services throughout the Islamicate world, supporting teachers and institutions as well as most students. Waqf-supported schools included living quarters for the teacher and a space for students. Waqf is differentiated from sadaqa, see N.J. Coulson, A History of Islamic Law, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964, 1997).

\textsuperscript{77} Molla indicates a person with an elementary education; a graduate of a mekteb. Ishan or ahun designates a person with a higher education; graduate of a medrese. 
\textsuperscript{78} Bringing together the material and spiritual worlds, waqfs were religious endowments that defined a property in perpetuity for a purpose serving the community. A donor designated the purpose and conditions before death in a waqfiyya or waqf document. The waqf ahli, or family waqf, provided an inheritance for the donor’s descendants. Waqf khayri, the charitable or public waqf, supported such social institutions as schools, mosques, gardens, the poor, orphans, or some other facet of society that embodied a donor’s intentions to reach his or her salvation in the hereafter through a pious act. A school supported by a waqf endowment linked education to larger social concerns, identifying it as an important community entity. Awqaf became a symbol of Soviet social change when they were eliminated as a source of funding for schools between 1917 and the 1920s. Waqf is differentiated from sadaqa, see N.J. Coulson, A History of Islamic Law, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964, 1997).
instruction. Other mektebs were located in a mosque, a yurt, or for some nomads under the open sky in the desert.\textsuperscript{79}

Brian Street’s description of this content as “maktab literacy” is appropriate since it intended not to teach widely applicable reading skills or broad thinking but a very specific literacy and ideology concerning how to live as a good Muslim.\textsuperscript{80} Street also discusses the level of actual alphabetic literacy that some students gained in mektebs. While his study of modern Iranian schools helps us to envision early Turkmen mektebs we can not know for certain the degree of alphabetic literacy Turkmen students gained. We do know, however, that a vociferous and energetic group—jadids—perceived that the numbers were insufficient. Muslim schools remained a site for the transmission of knowledge, but in the late nineteenth century, under the influence of western ideas about enlightenment and literacy, the traditional Muslim method of teaching became viewed as un-transferable in the modern world.\textsuperscript{81} This shift in regard for mektebs and mollas had a direct impact on the degree of authority that clergy could possess. In moving from a semi-oral method to one based firmly in phonetic teaching and the alphabet, clergy lost their hold over knowledge and learning.

\textit{Tuzemnye or Russian native schools}

Russian schools established for Turkmen were part of a larger system that the Russian administration developed first for Tatars, then Kazakhs, and then “eastern nationalities” generally.\textsuperscript{82} In Russian they were known as “russkia shkola” (Russian schools), “russko-

\textsuperscript{79}“Shkoly Turkmeny,” ZMNP, 1911, pp. 168-171.
\textsuperscript{81}B. Street, 1984, focuses on “transferable literacies,” that is skills learned in the mekteb that students could employ in the commercial world.
\textsuperscript{82}Under the Russian Imperial system the Turkmen were legally defined as inorodsty (alien), a term used to designate non-Russians in the empire. However, within Turkestan the term tuzemnye (native) was prevalent. See, Adeeb Khalid, 1998, p. 74.
“tuzemnya shkola” (Russian-native schools) or sometimes in official documents “inorodecheskiia uchilishcha” (schools for aliens). The Russian Ministry of Education differentiated between these institutions, for which the School Inspector had responsibility, and tuzemnaia shkola (native schools)—mektebs and medreses.83

Nineteenth-century development of educational systems and the Russian state’s accommodation of Islamic schools reflected a design to assimilate Muslims into the empire via Russification. Before Catherine II, the Russian state and church had not made consistent efforts to assimilate non-Russians. As a general rule, the state largely left its non-Russian inhabitants to their own religions until the nineteenth century, when missionary efforts included travel to Central Asia in the hopes of Russifying tuzemnye via ideas of Orthodoxy and empire.84 Nikolai Il’minskii (1822-1891), a scholar in the Missionary Division at the Kazan Academy, with the aid of his colleagues, developed this missionary activity into a formal educational system called the tuzemnye shkoly (native schools). The “Il’minskii method,” as it became known, advocated teaching non-Russians in their vernacular on the premise that it facilitated comprehension and mastery of Orthodoxy and would lead to adoption of Russian national ideals.

Il’minskii was assigned to work with Kazakhs as a member of the Orenburg Commission. The Orientalist V. V. Grigor’ev, as chairman of the Commission, oversaw the work of teachers and translators such as Nikolai Il’minskii, N. Bobrovnikov, and Ibrahim Altynsarin among Kazaks. He appreciated Il’minskii’s methods of promoting Christianity

84 In 1864, Minister of Education D. A. Tolstoi wrote to Tsar Alexander the II that “To enlighten the natives, to draw them closer to Russia and to the Russian spirit, constitutes in my opinion a goal of highest political importance.” Cf, Isabelle Kriendler, “Educational Policies toward the Eastern Nationalities in Tsarist Russia: A Study of Il’minskii’s System” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1969), p. 79. Il’minskii sought efficient means of bringing Christian education to natives, though others in the state insisted that natives must learn Russian since “assimilation of language assimilates also the nationality.” Cf, Kriendler,1969, p. 80.
through a real understanding of texts, yet he believed that the state could go a step further by making use of alphabet as well as language of instruction. He felt that Kazaks would convert to Orthodoxy if the historical influence of Tatar culture could be reduced. Identifying the Arabic alphabet as an important connection between the Kazakh education and Tatar cultural authority, he asked his teachers to translate Russian Orthodox texts into the Turkic vernacular, but with the Cyrillic alphabet. Grigor’ev intended not only to separate symbolically students from their Islamic heritage but also to pave the way for future instruction in Russian. Thus, Grigor’ev’s effort presents an early example of the Russian government’s attempts to influence a people’s culture and identity through alphabet.

Between 1863-1870 Il’minskii established a network of semi-official schools with permission from the state, the support of the Church, and some money from each. In 1870, D. A. Tolstoi, the Minister of Education, officially adopted Il’minskii’s model in a system for all eastern peoples. The Ministry accepted that the majority of Muslims would unlikely integrate into the Russian empire via Orthodoxy, yet recognized the powerful role education might play.

Regulations of 1907 outlined the intention to promote Russian ways of thinking via Russian language but without converting natives to Orthodoxy. The orientalist Vasilii V. Radlov, editor of the Russian Ministry of Education’s journal ZMNP wrote that the new Russo-Tatar schools would act as “a middle ground between our state education system and the Muslim population…[showing] the Muslims that the government in no way desires to concern itself with their religious notions, but is trying only to raise the level of their

85 Kriendler, pp. 56-59.
86 Il’minskii received his first grant from the Holy Synod in 1866. Kriendler, 1969, p. 71.
87 Tatars objected to the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, preferring to retain the Arabic script in which so much of their literature was recorded. Geraci, 1997, p. 159.
development, for their own good."88 Buddhist regions were also targeted after 1905, but Tolstoi primarily aimed “to penetrate the solid Muslim mass that was estranged from European civilization.”89

The Russian administration continued to seek ways of bringing Muslims into the empire while engendering the least amount of resistance. Although not applied universally throughout Russia, the Il’minskii system remained the basis for education until the 1917 Revolution.90 The russo-tuzemnye shkol established in Transcaspia (Turkmen lands) by the Imperial government were based on Il’minskii schools.

_Tuzemnye schools for Turkmen_

Adrienne Edgar writes that the influence of the tiny group of _tuzemnye_-educated Turkmen is significant in that they produced a Russian speaking, culturally Russified group who “later became the key political figures in the Soviet Turkmen republic.”91 “The goal of these schools was to ‘educate the natives in the spirit of respect for the throne and state, Russian law and power…’ and to prepare future Russian speaking translators, clerks, military officers, and teachers.”92 Graduates of _tuzemnye_ schools were given priority in government offices. Some were sent to St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kazan to further their education.

Like _jadids_, _tuzemnye_ graduates also represented a small number of men. According to the Turkmen historian Berdiew, the native population did not embrace the network of _tuzemnye_ schools.93 Edgar notes that the number of students enrolled in _tuzemnye_ schools

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89 Quoted in Kriendler, 1969, p. 164. 1905 marked a change in central policy, especially concerning religious freedom.
90 Kriendler, 1969, p. 70, 156-163. For example, native language instruction was not allowed in the Caucasus until 1905.
93 Adeeb Khalid, 1998, writes similarly about Uzbek natives.
was low, citing the Russian administrators’ count of 228 in 1908;\textsuperscript{94} only one hundred of these were ethnic Turkmen. A year later, according to Count Pahlen, there were 10 \textit{tuzemnye} schools in the Transcaspian region with 328 students\textsuperscript{95} in contrast to 179 \textit{mektebs} in 1893.\textsuperscript{96} By the 1914-15 academic year, 58 \textit{tuzemnye} schools functioned in Turkmen territory, compared to 209 \textit{mektebs}.\textsuperscript{97} Yet, despite the consistent growth in schools, in 1918 literacy hovered at less than 2\% among the Turkmen; 0\% among women.\textsuperscript{98} While the influence of \textit{tuzemnye} schools was not insignificant, ideas and activities through the larger Muslim world held greater sway over the manner in which Turkmen language and education developed in the beginning of the twentieth-century.

\textit{Turkmen in the Reforming Muslim World}

In the late nineteenth century, a handful of Turkmen demonstrated that they shared the concerns of Turkic and Muslim brethren regarding social and cultural development. In light of global shifts engendered by modernization, they feared that their societies would stagnate under the weight of traditional custom. Tatar and Uzbek \textit{jadids} in the Russian Empire and Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire had identified education as a social condition in need of immediate change in order to modernize. Likewise, Turkmen targeted literacy as a means to align their community with the modern world. In the late 1910s through the early 1920s \textit{jadid}-educated Turkmen writers referred to their efforts as “their

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{94} TsGA TSSR, f. 1, op. 1, d. 14, l. 150, in Durdiev, p. 29, 30; Edgar
  \item \textsuperscript{95} K. E. Bendrikov, \textit{Ocherkii po istorii narodnogo obrazovaniia v Turkestane (1865-1925 gody}} (Moscow: Izd. Akademii pedagogicheskikh nauk, 1960), p. 309.
  \item \textsuperscript{96} \textit{Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia, chast’} 32, 1911, pp. 188-189.
  \item \textsuperscript{98} Annagurdow, 1960, pp. 5-7.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
struggle against the ‘numbing’ social sickness that had spread among Turkmen.” They offered poems and prose that they anticipated “would ‘medicate’ the tragic condition this sickness had wrought upon their people.”\(^9\) One major issue was alphabet and expression of Turkmen language in writing.

The Turks of Central Asia had been using the Arabic script roughly since the advent of Islam in their region\(^1\) but by the mid-nineteenth century they debated its perceived inadequacy for use with Turkic dialects. Several intellectuals independently proposed Turkified forms of the Arabic script. They did not wish to abandon the script, but they wanted it to reflect Turkic sounds. While constructing new versions of the alphabet, these Turks were also, very consciously, constructing a national consciousness and a response to Russian colonial policies. These efforts carried over into the Soviet period and intensified when Turkification splintered into aspirations for national language development, such as Turkmenification for Turkmen, Uzbekification for Uzbeks.\(^2\)

\textit{1904 proposal for alphabet reform}

The first proposal for change in the Turkmen alphabet came not from a “\textit{jadid}.” However, his book was an aid to those \textit{jadids} who made later proposals. In 1904, Muhammet Sadykbeý Agabekow (Agabekzade) (1866-1944), wrote, in Russian, \textit{A textbook of the Turkmen dialect with supplementary anthology of proverbs and sayings of the Turkmen of the Transcaspian oblast}.\(^3\) In it he proposed modifications to the Arabic script

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\item \(^9\) M. Söýegow, Türkmen Edebiyatında ceditçilik dönemi hakkında bazı tesbitler ve yeni malumatlar, \textit{bilig}, No. 7, Summer 1998, p. 114. Such medicinal metaphors were common in these years.
\item \(^2\) See appendix B.
\item \(^3\) In the 1890s, Pavel Polikarpovich Shimkevich (1856-1900) wrote a primer for learning Turkmen, but his did not employ the Arabic script at all, instead he used Cyrillic. See Söýegow, 1993, pp. 5-8. Agabekow’s was the first to use the Arabic script and to address the possibilities of modifying it to suit the Turkmen speech patterns.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
for better expression of Turkmen. An Azerbaijani Turk, he came to Turcology during his military service as an officer in the Russian Army. From 1894 to 1897 he studied Oriental languages in the Foreign Ministry’s Asia department before being assigned to the Turkmen villages of Garagala and Tejen. Despite the author’s being Azerbaijani, his command of Turkmen was very good. His 100-page book addressed, in pages 1-20: Alphabet, consonants and vowels with special attention to ۆ, ى, ١, and ę, the peculiarities of the Turkmen dialect and its pronunciation. Pages 21-100 examined Turkmen morphology, grammar and usage. Agabegow’s textbook book was used widely in classes throughout the 1910s.

Agabekow’s friend and colleague, Ivan Alexander Beliaev (d. 1920), was also not a jadid, but he too contribute to the development of Turkmen language by writing the first Russian-Turkmen Dictionary in 1913 and A Turkmen Language Grammar in 1915. Having graduated from St. Petersburg University’s Oriental language faculty he studied Turkic linguistics and ethnography. Moreover, as Head School Inspector for the Transcaspian Oblast, he edited Agabekow’s alphabet textbook and included jadid mektebs in his 1915-1916 Survey of Turkmen schools. He is credited with having pursued practical measures to ensure that all Turkmen schools—jadid, tuzemnye, and traditional mektebs received supplies. His 176-page dictionary earned him prestige among Turcologists in Transcaspia and St. Petersburg, for he not only used the Arabic script to show Turkmen words, but also took the time to indicate long vowels.

Influences of Tatar Jadidism and secularized education on Turkmen

104 Söyegow, 1993, pp. 10-11.
105 Zakaspiiskoe obozrenie, 16 June 1910.
106 Söyegow, 1993, p. 16.
The first specifically Turkmen language textbook *New Method Turkmen Schools: Turkmen Language* was published in 1913. The author of several textbooks, numerous articles and one Russian-Turkmen dictionary, Alişbeg Aliew (1883-1933), was schooled in Baku, before becoming a teacher in Turkmen villages of Tejen, Buzmein and Kaka. His contributions to Turkmen *jadidism* began with his textbook in which he situated his efforts and methodology within a global perspective by explaining to readers that a “phonetic method” was being employed by Muslims around the world, noting specifically “Turkey (sic) and Egypt.” His assertion, however overstated, alludes to widespread trends toward reform. It also illustrates the Turkmen view of themselves as part of the Turco-Muslim community within the larger global context.

The “new method” referred specifically to pedagogy, and more generally to related social systems and religious institutions that would also change through a modernized understanding of the world. This movement to reform Turco-Islamic society via education is most strongly linked to the Crimean Tatar Ismail Gasprinskii (1851-1914). His Russian/Turkic language newspaper *Perevodchik/Tercüman* (1883-1915), disseminated *jadid* ideas throughout the Turkic world. The first of several Turks to propose language reforms, Gasprinskii advocated for a unified-Turkic literary language and a reformed Arabic script. He envisioned a fusion of Turkic linguistic and cultural bonds, over-riding dialectical and regional differences, designed to prepare Turkic society for participation in the changing

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107 A. Samoilovich, “Pervyi bukvar’ dlia turkmenov,” *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 13 November 1913, cited in Myratgeldi Söyegow, “Istoriia odnogo uchebnika v predisloviiakh i retsenziakh,” unpublished manuscript, p. 188. “They shared these hopes with reformist elites throughout Asia and the Middle East (Japan, China, Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey), as well as leading international linguists and intellectuals.” Smith, 1998, p. 122.

108 As early as the 1870s, Tatar *mollas* in Kazan, Shihabeddin Merjani and Abdulkayyum Nasry, promoted the use of the vernacular language in schools and employed Western methods of scholarship. Rorlich, 1986, pp. 50-68.

modern world. Gasprinskii ensured distribution of *Tercüman* to all the Turkic regions as a tool for saving the Muslim Turks of the Russian empire from cultural degeneration. He envisioned “a national unity based on a combined ethno-linguistic and Islamic platform, and a transformation and [restructuring] of society along modern lines.” Although he strongly advocated teaching in the local language, for example, Crimean Tatar or Kazakh, Gasprinskii himself used the Ottoman Turkish vernacular in his publications, “addressing as broad an audience as possible, and primarily the common man.”

In 1908, Gasprinskii enumerated his aspirations:

Although among the fifty million-strong Turkish nation there are differences in dialects (*narechie*) and pronunciation, from one region to another, their language is one and the same. Therefore, this whole nation has the right to have a common literary language, and if (the Turkic community) desires to exist in the world, it must, more than anything and before everything, work on the unity of language.

**Accommodating Russia**

That Jadidist and Russian methods sometimes coincided was not simple irony; it had been Gasprinskii’s intention from the beginning. Gasprinskii believed that it was better to come to terms with the realities of Russian colonialism and work within them, using its institutions to develop educated nationalists who would be the future of Turkic nationalisms.

Without furnishing themselves with the essential tools of modern societ[y], the Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire vis-a-vis Russian rule were doomed. After all, many of these essentials could come through or even from the Russians, and the opposition of the Russians might seriously jeopardize such a development from the start.  

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110 Turkmen intellectuals arrived at similar conclusions about the role of tribal dialects within the Turkmen speech community. K. Böörijif, “Türkmen edebi diiimi esasasy yakdalary. Birinji Türkmenistan ylmy konferensiýasyna hödil edilen tezis,” *Türkmen Medenijeti*, No. 4-5, April-May, 1930, p. 3.  
112 Kirimli, 1996, pp. 46-47.  
113 Kirimli, 1996, 35, citing Gasprinskii.  
Gasprinskii never rejected Russian cultural influence or Russian language instruction. On the contrary, he hoped that the Turks would find ways to use it to their advantage. He advocated working within the structure of Russian colonization. This negotiation of the colonial experience created another “locus of enunciation,” for Turkmen and Tatars alike.\textsuperscript{115} Their colonial status defined the voice in which they selectively chose to express themselves within the Russian Empire. Gasprinskii sought to use the Russian colonial framework to benefit Turks. Publishing his newspaper in both Turkish and Russian, and employing the Russian version of his name rather than the Turkic “Gaspıralı,” he was mindful of the restrictions of the imperial administrative system. He worked within it, not against it. Later Turkmen scholars declared that Gasprinskii set the standard by which Turkmen approached the political and cultural power structure of the USSR.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Jadids’} desire to promote modern concepts such as mass literacy and to empower the Turks through a reformulation of knowledge required social shifts that realigned the place of the \textit{ulema}. Changes within education, which had been under the purview of the clergy for centuries, meant disempowering \textit{ulema} both individually and as a corporate body. \textit{Jadids} encouraged social change by shifting authority of formal knowledge away from Islamic rituals to lay methods, punctuating the social shifts that emerge with cultural reform. However, this reconfiguration of knowledge and cultural transmission did \textit{not} indicate a move away from Islam. Rather, as Adeeb Khalid’s work demonstrates, these reforms attempted to save Muslim culture by improving from within.

\textit{Jadids} aimed not to eliminate the Islamic contribution to education, but to reformulate the cultural authority that the clergy held and to introduce secular studies into

\textsuperscript{115} See Khalid, 1998, chapter 3, on the origins of jadidism and the influence of Tatar cultural reform.
\textsuperscript{116} Täçmyradow, Söýegow, Durdiew, 1995.
broader curricula. Activist Muslims consisted of both cultural intellectuals and reform-minded educators from the Islamic realm of teaching. Jadid proposals aimed to pull education into a middle space between religious-based instruction and the demands of the secular modern world without rejecting their Muslim identity. While jadids separated physical spaces of learning and worship (i.e., classrooms and mosques), they merged epistemological spaces. In other words, jadids did not intend to separate instruction into secular and religious with hard divides; rather, they meant to create a merger. Redefining knowledge and social restrictions on access to knowledge, the fresh intellectual environment taught European sciences as well as Islamic doctrine.

**The Phonetic Method**

A core component of the jadids’ “new method” education was a phonetic method of teaching. This method required every phoneme to be marked by a distinct grapheme.

Nineteenth-century efforts to stimulate mass literacy led to beliefs that accurate representation of speech would ease teaching and expedite literacy. Orthography and script became a focus among Turks who perceived the Arabic script to be a hindrance. It was considered difficult to learn, and Turkic languages have more vowel sounds than the traditional Arabic orthography can represent. For example, ş, ş, and ğ do not suffice for Turkmen vowels sounds: [a] [ä], [e], [i], [y], [o], [ö], [u], [ü]. Therefore Turks proposed

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119 “Türkmen Bilim Heýatynyň Türkmen İmlasy Hakyndaky Karary,” Türkmen Ili, 1923, No. 5, 6, pp. 51-52.
either reforming the Arabic script to accommodate Turkic language needs or abandoning the writing system altogether in favor of a Latin-based script. Turkmen intellectuals elected to use a reformed Arabic script. They adopted the Tatar idea of a direct connection between the spoken language and representative signs. The phonetic method appealed to Turkmen primarily because, in addition to the nine vowel sounds shared by all Turkic languages, Turkmen possesses distinct long vowel sounds. The traditional script could not reflect these long vowels, but an expanded, modified alphabet could with added diacritics.

_Turkmen jadids_

The nineteenth-century intersection between language, script, identity and politics turned Turkic schools into arenas for competition between traditionalists (qadimci) and reformists (jadid) cultures. While traditional confessional schools represented the Turkic communities’ ties to the Muslim world and held the Arabic script sacred, jadid schools followed Gasprinskii’s example in breaking with traditional methods and using a reformed Arabic alphabet, new teaching methods and secular texts.

The jadid classroom provided a forum for direct presentation of ideas to Turkmen boys and girls, while print media carried jadidism beyond the classroom to the general population. In shifting the authority of formal knowledge from Islamic rituals overseen by clergy to lay methods taught by Muslims trained in pedagogy, jadids transferred cultural production to a secular realm and encouraged basic social change. They used the press to discuss their concerns publicly. In the 1910s, books by Turkmen addressed the new method of teaching, education for women, the role of culture, and the importance of teaching in the Turkmen language (as opposed to Russian or Arabic). Textbooks frequently announced  

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reform proposals.\textsuperscript{122} Additionally, articles in the Russian government publication, \textit{Obzor Zakaspiiskoi Oblasti}, discussed pedagogical issues such as the phonetic method.\textsuperscript{123}

\textit{A unified Turkic language}

\textit{Jadidism} was not a set ideology; there were differing shades of \textit{jadidism} throughout the Islamic world. One area where the Turkmen reformers differed from other \textit{jadids} was on the topic of a unified- or pan-Turkic language. A unified-Turkic language had been a central tenet of Gasprinskii’s philosophy. Turkmen gratefully acknowledged Gasprinskii’s contributions, but disagreed with his proposal to unify the Turkic languages because they wanted to emphasize their Turkmen identity.\textsuperscript{124} They saw the written language as reflective of their group identity and insisted on denoting the peculiarities of their regional speech in their written language. Modern Turkmen society identified itself as both Islamic and Turkic, as well as a Russian colony; but in reforming their alphabet, they asserted their Turkmen identity (\textit{Türkmençilik}).

The Turkmen’s concern to accentuate \textit{Türkmençilik}, and to do it through the alphabet, was one important effort that carried over into the national debates of the 1920s. Related efforts in literacy, education, language standardization, and the use of each to express a modern identity were early Soviet goals that expanded upon late-nineteenth century progressive movements. \textit{Jadidism} was not the only cultural influence among the Turkmen. However, focus on their participation in the movement broadens our perspective of regional interaction and enriches our understanding of reform among Turkmen, which is at the root of

\textsuperscript{122} A. Aliew, \textit{Täze Türkmen elifbasy we ilki okuw} [The New Turkmen alphabet and the first school] (Taşkent, 1920). See appendix C for examples.
\textsuperscript{124} Muhammet Gelidew, \textit{Türkmenistan Gazetisi}, 5 January 1926, p. 2.
post-Soviet policies concerning language and education. Tracing the achievements of Turkmen who had been educated in jadid schools and their mentorship or encouragement of other Turkmen to similarly promote Turkmen identity in their pursuit of modernity illuminates the continuities between pre- and post-Revolutionary reform.

Turkmen were not founding members of the reform movements. They did not participate in the initial waves of polemics regarding education, language or modernity. They did, however, take part in the implementation of these reforms by studying in jadid schools, then returning to Turkmen lands to teach others, and continuing to uphold the ideals into the Soviet era. They were a second generation of jadids, building upon the works of Ottoman, Tatar, and Uzbek jadids. This is a history of many, with varied voices or “loci of enunciation.” Here I give examples of Turkmen jadids’ work in order to outline the intellectual lineage this study traces and illustrate the influence of jadidism Turkmen responded to global change. Each biography encapsulates the values and ideas that Turkmen grappled with in the twentieth century. Just as Turkmen worked within and borrowed from the larger Turco-Muslim world, each Turkmen reformer relied on the strength of the larger movement.

Influenced by Ismail Gasprinskii, educated Turkmen began producing jadid literature in the early 1900s. Building upon broader ideas circulating throughout the Muslim world, they created a Turkmen jadidism. They wrote poetry, polemics, textbooks and grammars to ensure that teachers had materials for teaching in the new method and the populace had access to the ideas. However, Turkmen had come to the ideas later than other Muslim groups and therefore acknowledged the importance of other Turkic and Muslim groups’ influence on their thinking. They credited Gasprinskii individually, but recognized the many voices that
had contributed to *jadidism*’s arrival in Transcaspia. Muhammetgulu Atabaýew (1885-1916) stated this plainly in his article, “Much of the work among Turkmen has derived from other peoples.”

Muhammetgulu Atabaýew, a graduate of Tashkent’s pedagogical institute, wrote articles about the need for school reform in the Turkmen/Persian language journal *Zakaspiiskaia Tuzemnaia*. He argued, in order to effect change in social conditions, the Turkmen community first needed to address instruction of reading and writing, general education, and the modernization of Turkmen culture.

*To a people, school and study is above all: food, drink, everything. Without education there is no foundation...[and as the] Koran reads ‘Ya Muhammed Read! Let everything be!’ These words make it incumbent upon us to learn. But, with which method is it easiest to teach children to read and write? This is the question.*

This passage indicates the coalescence of tradition and modernity in *jadid* thought. Atabaýew buttresses his entreaty on education with traditional wisdom and a succinct reference to the Koran, illustrating that while a secularizing movement, *jadidism* was not anti-Islamic.

Alyșbeg Aliew (1883-1933), having studied pedagogy in Baku, published *New Method Turkmen Schools* as a textbook to introduce the new methodology in the classroom. He also produced the first reformed Turkmen alphabet. Muhammetgulu Atabaýew wrote newspaper articles entitled “Work in Schools and Türkmen Mektebs” and “The New Order of Schools” encouraging teachers to employ Aliew’s text and the new

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125 “Tüm İşlerde Türkmenler Başka Milletlerden Geridir,” *Zakasipiskaia Tuzemnaia*, February 6, 1915, p. 1. I translate “*millet*” here as “people” because in 1915 the word did not yet mean “nation” as it does today.


128 Alyșbeg Alieyew, *Yeni Usul Türkmen Mektebi* (Baku, 1913; Aşgabat, 1914).
method. Both aimed to support the establishment of jadid schools in Turkmen lands, just as others scholars had throughout Turkestan. Atabaýew attacked mollas as “traditionalists” [qadimchi], viewing the power they held over knowledge to be one of the greatest problems of the Turkmen people. The metaphor of “waking” the Muslim people from a “sleep” or state of ignorance of the world was a common jadid trope.

\[\text{The Mollas will awaken in us absolutely nothing useful.} \\
\text{The Mollas have kept your people backward.} \\
\text{They don’t even know right from wrong, yet they receive lots of money.} \\
\text{Hey, people, don’t lend your ears to these mollas, wake up from your sleep!}\]

To underscore his intent to replace clergy with professional pedagogues, Atabaýew substituted the title “teacher” [muallim] for “molla.” Like many of his peers, Atabaýew also helped to establish a jadid elementary school; in his hometown of Nohur

\textit{Educating Turkmen Women}

An important topic in Turkmen jadid literature concerned questions of women in society. Reformers focused on raising up the entire Turkmen community, women needed specific attention as “traditional” customs left them undereducated and with underdeveloped skills. The authors pushed for better social conditions, education, and the rights of women. Atabaýew first tackled these questions in his newspaper article “ Newly Opened Turkmen Schools”

\textit{I am told that among the Yomuts of Çeleken sixty plus women and girls study and learn to write in the new educational framework... A new school system has been founded in Çeleken.}

132 Söýegow, unpublished manuscript, p. 155.
Seven-year old girls will begin studying at these new schools within the next five to six months...Thank God! In Ahal, Mary, and Tejen Turkmen have established new method schools. Further politically astute articles such as “The Intellect of Turkmen Women,” and “Human Trade [Trafficking] among Turkmen” followed.

As with many social questions, activities among other Turkic groups influenced Turkmen thinking. A. Aliew, for example, specifically advocated that Turkmen follow the Tatar example. Acting as a model, Aliew advocated women’s issues in his life as well as in his work. His wife Raisa Nikolaeva was a teacher and later a school principal. His daughter worked as a librarian. After her father’s death she compiled a bibliography of his works. Aliew’s second daughter, Kamilla Alyşbegovna, earned her PhD (Kandidat) in Philology and became the Dean of the English Language Faculty in Tashkent. Still, the topic of women does not appear to have been as extensive as it was among other Turks, Uzbeks, for example. This could appear so due to a lack of extant materials or the fact that no discussions among Turkmen were quite as extensive as those among other groups.

Poetry held a special place and powerful place in Turco-Islamic culture. It was thus an appropriate format for transmitting ideas. In his poetry, Muhammetgulyç Biçare (Nizami) (1885-1922), himself educated in a Turkmen-jadid mekteb, echoed Atabaýew’s approach. He used the traditional format of poetry to link the question of education with traditional values and general social needs.

Hey friends, if you graduate from the Turkmen mekteb
No matter how much torment you suffer, in the end you will be impoverished

137 Kamp, Edgar, Russian Review.
The imam holds the greatest prestige in the mosque,
No matter how much torment you suffer, in the end you will be impoverished.\textsuperscript{138}

In another poem Biçare addressed the horrors of World War I, which he was very much against. Here, he reveals the Turks’ lack of control over their place in the world at a turbulent time.

\begin{quote}
Some infidel just left for Germany on his horse.
One by one the fissures of the world open. Friends, people after people are succumbing to the Russian illness, This time, what will happen?

One by one their mouths are turning red (from blood)
The English have arrived in Turkey
Among them all is a great fight
Enough already! My God!\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

Mollamurt (1885-1930) published poetry addressing social concerns such as the rights of women. In “Advice” he wrote a warning to husbands not to be left behind by wives who would be learning about the world and reaching out toward it:

\begin{quote}
Your woman won’t be detained from the new path
The old path stripped of its destiny turns gray\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

Efforts to include women in the push for enlightenment reflected efforts to address society as a whole. Poetry reflected these broad social aims. Molladurdu Nazimi wrote:

\begin{quote}
There is no greater work in the world than service to one’s people [il]
With knowledge your youth will bring prosperity to the group [millet]\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

In 1915 he wrote poetry that employed the typical tropes and specifically warns against being illiterate, which he equates with “ignorance.”

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{139} Muhammetkylyç Biçare originally published in \textit{Zakaspiiskaia Tuzemnaia}, reprinted in Söýegow, unpublished manuscript, p. 117.
\end{flushleft}
Intelligence flows from proper learning, but
For those who can not read, misfortune will increase
Do not let your life pass in ignorance, without making an effort
School is the healing remedy for long suffering.\textsuperscript{142}

In Abdulhakim Gulmuhammedow’s poem, \textit{Weeping Lover}, he applauded and encouraged progressive endeavors. Recognizing bravery as a characteristic of the Turkmen past, he proposes a new approach appropriate to new circumstances. A title replete with sufi symbolism harnesses a familiar sentiment to endorse the new ideas. Gulmuhammedow’s mention of using a “weapon” for the sake of culture blended Bolshevik language with \textit{jadid} ideas and illustrates that the two intersected at the concept of enlightenment for betterment of the individual and the community.\textsuperscript{143}

\begin{quote}
You Turkmen, in the past you brandished a sword
Your bravery was known throughout the world.
Now in place of the sword you take a pen,
Today you have attained your wish and goal

For the sake of culture, you wield a weapon
Strive. Take care not to spend time sitting idle.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

In “Genuine Culture comes from Intellectuals,” from the same \textit{Bright Hope} collection, he depicts education as a universal remedy.

\begin{quote}
If every people (millet) would awaken from a deep sleep
They could immediately conquer thinking.
The ailment of ignorance is a hefty one indeed,
This kind of sickness will make you blind.

What does a people without education find?
If you are knowledgeable the world is yours!
If there is wealth that is something,
But in the end you will go hungry.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{143} This exemplifies the “myth” that Graff, 1991 tackles.
\textsuperscript{144} Abdulhakim Gulmuhammedow, “Aglan Yar,” in \textit{Umit Ýalkymlary} (Aşgabat, 1926).
\textsuperscript{145} Abdulhakim Gulmuhammedow, “Medeniýet Ilimden Aslydyr,” \textit{Ýmit Ýalkymlary} (Ashgabat, 1926).
\end{footnotes}
Atabaýew wrote several articles in Zakaspiiskaia Tuzemnaia discussing his opinion that the Turkmen had fallen behind other peoples and remained comparatively backward.\(^{146}\) This one also underscores the need for the Turkmen tribes to come together in order to form a nation. In “The Country of the Turkmen,” he invoked the names of the five largest tribes indicates a concern with unity.

\[
\text{Turkmen are in their own (national/cultural) space} \\
\text{From the western path reaching to the Caspian} \\
\text{On the other side lies the Karakum desert, straight ahead is Persia} \\
\text{Our space is like a castle surrounded by three walls.}
\]

The waters of the Amu Darya flow from the east \\
Familiar with the Turkmen, her enemies are scared \\
Yomut, Göklen, Teke, Saryk, Ersary tribes \\
Come together like brothers.\(^{147}\)

Durdu Gylyç and Molla Murt expressed like concerns in poetry throughout the 1910s and 1920s. Berdi Kerbabaew likewise showed that Turkmen “backwardness” could be ameliorated with the New Method. Other works, usually satirical, specifically identified the Turkmen social problems as created by the unethical, bribe-taking puppets of the Tsarist local government. These authors did not sign their works however. In fear of reprisal, they adopted pseudonyms.\(^{148}\)

\textit{Intellectual influences from the Islamic world}

Comments by Atabaýew and Geldiew acknowledge the important influence that other Turks had on Turkmen thinking. Turkmen knew that they were participating in something larger than themselves. This was underscored by the fact that most Turkmen intellectuals or

teachers—even clergy—had traveled beyond Turkmen lands to obtain education. The biographies of individual jadids illuminate the importance participation in the larger Muslim and Turkic worlds had on these individuals. Still, it was the local level that required their attention. Many returned home for just that reason.

Orazmammet Wepayew (1883-1937) graduated from a Bukharan jadid medrese and studied law in Istanbul before returning to Turkmenistan to work simultaneously as a judge, teacher, and head of a regional education office. In the early 1920s, he published poems and articles in journals, such as Turkmen Ili and Tokmak, in which he endorsed Turkmen language purity;\(^{149}\) a point of pride and contention among jadids and one that continues today.

> We don’t like the Azeri Turks, they came to us to steal
> The Tatars open their mouths, laugh at their language
> Look sharply at the Uzbek and the Kyrgyz
> Really, why are you deceiving us?!\

> If you want to understand the Turkmen, look to Oguz Han,\(^{150}\)
> Who are those Ottomans? Listen to the Kayı tribe!\(^{151}\)

Wepaýew was living in the northern Dashoguz region when he wrote “I had to go to the village,” in which he addressed Berdi Kerbabaýew who was living in Ashgabat.

> Hey, esteemed Kerbabaýew\(^{152}\), I have a question for you
> How many years is it going to take to open the Turkmen eyes?
> You take a look around and then get back to me.
> Which language do we need to wake our people from their sleep?\(^{153}\)

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\(^{150}\) The mythical, eponymous leader of the Turkmen.

\(^{151}\) Kayı was the tribe whence the Ottomans developed.

\(^{152}\) Kerbabaýew, a Turkmen poet and author of literature.

Semseddin Kerimi (?-?) studied at the *jadid medrese* opened by his father and uncle in the Turkmen village Kaka before attending the Leningrad Oriental Institute to become a teacher in Turkmenistan. In the late 1920s, he advocated the education of women and enrichment of the Turkmen lexicon in published articles. He was later a delegate to the First Turkmen Linguistic Conference in 1930 where he contributed to efforts in language standardization and codification.154

Alişbeg Aliew (1885-1916) studied pedagogy in Baku, Atabaýew and Gümüşali Böriew (1896-1942) in Taşkent. Chapter three specifically explores the work of Abdullah Gelenow (?-?), who like Kerbabaew studied at a Buharan *medrese* before going to St. Petersburg University; Allahgulu Garahanow (1892-1938), who like Muhhamet Geldiew was a student of a Buharan *medrese* and the Galiya *medrese* in Ufa; Abdulhakym Gulmuhammedow (1885-1931), a graduate of a Buharan medrese, and Istanbul and St. Petersburg Universities. Each of these men contributed to Turkmen ways of thinking.155

Moladurdu Annagylgyç (1860-1922), Muhammedgylyç Biçare (Nizami, 1885-1922), Allahberdi Hojaniýazoglu (Mollamurt, 1885-1930), Karaja Burunow (1898-1965), obtained their education in local *mektep-medreses*. Others, about whom we have less information Süphanberdi Öwezberdioglu (Körmolla, 1876-1934), and Durdu Kylyç (1886-1950), played important roles promoting the *jadid* movement Turkmen through poetry.156

The above-mentioned individuals represent a generation of *jadid*-inspired Turkmen. They returned home to promote progressive ideas among the youth who became the ‘second generation’ of *jadid*-inspired Turkmen. This second generation of Turkmen reformers

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benefited from the guidance of the aforementioned men, who attended *jadid* schools in urban centers beyond the Turkmen lands.\(^\text{157}\)

Kumusali Börüew (1896-1942) did not attend a *jadid medrese*, but throughout the 1920s, in his capacity as director of the Turkmen Academic Commission and the Turkmen Cultural Commission, Minister of Education, and a contributor to the State Publishing House, he oversaw much of the work on the Turkmen language and alphabet. He provided forums for others with formal *jadid* schooling to express their ideas. In this way he facilitated the continuation of their pursuits into the Soviet period. Furthermore, he collaborated extensively on textbooks and language development with *jadid*-educated Muhammet Geldiew (see below). Börüew remained active in the realm of language development throughout the 1920s and was at the forefront of works to spread literacy and use the written language to symbolize the Turkmen national culture.\(^\text{158}\)

The playwright Ayitjan Haldurdiew (?-?) attended the Turkmen Pedagogical Institute, which in the early 1920s was located in Tashkent. There the director, Alişbeg Aliýew, author of the first Turkmen textbook and creator of a reformed Arabic script (see above), mentored Haldurdiew, advising him to take new approaches to Turkmen themes. Haldurdiew returned to Turkmenistan where his dramatic plays such as “Without a Brideprice” challenged what he saw as “conservative” ideas. Throughout the 1920s, his works were performed at the Turkmen State Theater along with those of Karaca Burunov, Semseddin Kerimi, Berdi Kerbabaýew, and Yaradankulu Barayev, graduates of the “new method” school in the Turkmen village of Kaka.\(^\text{159}\)

\(^{157}\) Khalid…uses term generation


Muhammed Geldiew: jadid efforts in the early-Soviet era

As the number of prominent jadids illustrates, Turkmen undertook reform as a response to global change. The linguist Muhammed Geldiew, more than any other individual, personified the larger processes and interacted with many of the progressive Turkmen named above. A graduate of a Başkurt jadid medrese, who became an important cultural leader in the early years of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, Geldiew’s work provides an example of the continuation of jadid ideals into the Soviet period. A smenovekhovet, Geldiew used his positions to accommodate Soviet central policy with Turkmen cultural reform as well as to make Soviet policy serve Turkmen needs.160

The Galiýa medrese in Ufa, where Geldiew studied, embodied jadid ideals. Its records are well preserved and consequently we can know much about the education of Geldiew and his generation of earlier Soviet reformers. For example, the curriculum included history, mathematics, geography, ecology, chemistry and physics. The library was reportedly rich and the students had access to newspapers in Russian, Tatar and Arabic.161 Ufa was an important provincial center where leaders such as Zeki Velidi Togan, SultangAliew, and Lenin visited and made speeches. In short, Geldiew and the other jadid students lived at the intersection of Islamic, Turkic and Russian worlds. It was fitting, then, that their education reflected these intersections. Yet, the Soviet system challenged this intersection and challenged the Turkmen to locate themselves culturally and intellectually in the new socialist state.

In December 1919, Lenin issued a directive to national leaders to begin work on the eradication of illiteracy as the first step in bringing revolutionary culture to the masses in the

161 Mansur Khasanov, Galimjan Ibragimov (Kazan, 1969), p. 11-12, 90-123.
shortest time possible.\textsuperscript{162} In its decree “The Elimination of Illiteracy within the RSFSR population,” the People’s Commissariat announced that those aged 8 to 50 who could not read or write had a duty to become literate in either their mother tongue or Russian. Simultaneously, the People’s Commissariat of Education established a series of state schools aimed at literacy.\textsuperscript{163} Results were seen as early as 1920 with a Turkmen language edition of Aliew’s \textit{The Newest Turkmen Alphabet and Primary schools}, and \textit{Türkmenistan}, the first Turkmen language newspaper; the second, \textit{Turkmen Ili}, came out in 1922.

Yet, the alphabet required further refinement as well as standardized orthographic rules. At this time, the Turkmen were using a 33 letter Arabic alphabet. Diacritics augmented the three traditional vowels \( و \), \( ب \), and \( ك \) to reflect nine phonemes. However, representation of all the long vowels, critical to reflecting the phonetic distinctions of spoken Turkmen, remained unresolved. At the end of 1921, Turkmen intellectuals created the \textit{Türkmen Bilim Heýaty} [Turkmen Academic Commission], with Moscow’s money, to create a reformed Arabic alphabet that would reflect the peculiarities of spoken Turkmen and to codify orthography and grammar in order to aid in the spread of literacy.\textsuperscript{164}

Here, an overview of early Soviet language policy will explain how central and peripheral ideas about the social role of script were initially in accord. This introduction to the concomitant goals of Soviet administration and \textit{jadid}/national reformers also demonstrates how \textit{jadid} efforts extended into the Soviet era.

\textsuperscript{162} G.P. Serdyuchencko, pp. 23-24; Tachmyradow, 1984, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{164} Muhammed Geldiew, “Türkmen bilim komissiyasyнын дүзүлүшү өнүн өден өштери,” \textit{Turkmen Ili}, 1924, No. 6, 7, 8, p. 70.
The first years of Soviet power constituted a period of great cultural enterprise. Moscow encouraged local activity among all the non-Russian peoples with such policies as korenizatsiia, or natsionalizatsiia as it was initially named. Natsionalizatsiia [nationalization] referred to the building up of the titular nationalities, and took more specific forms such as Turkmenization and Uzbekification (Uzbekizatsiia). But this ignored such smaller ethnic groups as the Persian Baluchi in southern Turkmenistan. The term korenizatsiia [indiginization] included all korennye people. Korenizatsiia comes from the word “root” and could literally be translated as “enrooting,” which better connotes Bolshevik aspirations to entice and involve local cadres in building socialism; we may consider this as laying the roots of socialism. During the 1920s, this program emphasized equality of all national cultures and endorsed national languages. It aimed to replace Europeans who had been part of the Russian imperial government with indigenous leaders literate in the local vernacular. Natsionalizatsiia also helped to promote ideas of a loyal, socialist populace.

Because socialism needed an educated populace, illiteracy became an enemy of the state. A military-like campaign to eradicate illiteracy from the Soviet Union was organized by the All-Union Extraordinary Commission for the Liquidation of Illiteracy. This Commission produced teaching materials in local vernaculars and motivated public interest. ‘Likbez’ (likvidatsiia bezgramotnosti), “the Liquidation of Illiteracy!” became an adjective to describe new schools, as well as a cultural war cry.166

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165 See Terry Martin
Korenizatsiia encouraged Turkmen intellectuals to forge a space for their own concerns and to continue their work in the cultural sphere through negotiation with Soviet central policy rather than resisting it. While center and periphery may have had divergent long-term goals, some short-term methods were complementary in the 1920s. Moscow relied on local intellectuals to write books in local languages and supply materials to newly opened schools. Locals relied on central organs to fund national activities.

Türkmen Bilim Heýaty: The Turkmen Academic Commission

In pursuit of mass enlightenment, the Commission identified language standardization as a necessary precursor to literacy. And, they sponsored the phonetic method of teaching. Still, they were not satisfied with the Arabic script. Lack of satisfaction depicting the Turkmens’ long vowel sounds continued to hold victory at bay. Thus, between 1923 and 1925, the Commission further refined the Turkmen Arabic script, grammar and orthography rules.¹⁶⁷ As a member of the Turkmen Academic Commission, Geldiew undertook the bulk of Turkmen language standardization in the 1920s. In 1923 he published rules for standardized spelling, and grammar, and addressed the long vowel issue by adding diacritics to build more vowel graphemes and creating a categorically Turkmen, reformed-Arabic alphabet.¹⁶⁸

Geldiew generated Turkmen language and alphabet reform within a Soviet committee and published the results in a Soviet organ, Turkmen Ili. It was an example of constructive negotiation between central and peripheral powers. Even while this work took place, proposals of Latin-based scripts were being discussed throughout the Islamic world and Russia, but until 1926 Turkmen worked only on an Arabic script. As with pre-revolutionary

¹⁶⁷ “Türkmen bilim komissiýasynyň imla dogrusynda bolan kararynda göçürme,” Türkmen Ili, 1924, Nos. 6,7,8.
¹⁶⁸ Tachmuradow 1984, p 160.
reforms, the alphabet signified Turkmen membership in the larger Turco-Islamic world, but it also promoted a specifically Turkmen identity.

**1923 Reformed Arabic Script**

The Turkmen Academic Commission’s first step was to codify the Turkmen Arabic alphabet and orthography. For this they called on the experience of other Turkic groups.†69 Representatives from different Turkic areas assisted the Turkmen, but the influence of Tatar and Başkurt linguists seems to have been prevalent.†70 Gibad (Gabat) Habibullowitç Alparow (1888-1936), a schoolmate of Geldiew’s from the Galiya medrese, was the most involved and influential. He assisted the Turkmen Academic Commission from 1922-1924 and continued thereafter to play a significant role in Turkmen orthographic reform, collaborating with Geldiew on more than ten language textbooks.†71

In his capacity as member of the Turkmen Academic Council, Geldiew took on the talk of drafting a reformed Arabic alphabet and standardizing the grammar. One of Geldiew’s steadfast convictions was that Turkmen should be viewed as a language possessing peculiarities that set it apart from other Turkic languages. This 1923 proposal was designed to distinguish vowel graphemes to a degree not found in earlier Turkmen alphabets. Each phoneme was signified by a different symbol, created by a combination of letter and diacritics, unlike earlier alphabets that used individual graphemes to represent multiple phonemes. This reform also addressed the controversial vowels. Geldiew attempted to codify spelling and grammar as well as letters. He first created or borrowed

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†69 M. Geldiew, “Türkmen bilim komissiyaniň düzülişi hem onyň eden işleri,” Türkmen Ili, No. 6, 7, 8, 1924.
†71 Täçmyradow, 1989, pp. 8-9; Durdýew, 1995, bibliography. Neither the assistance of this Tatar, nor the contributions of the Azeri Agabekow, in any way diminish the Turkmen nature of these reforms. While not Turkmen themselves, and though Alparow encouraged reliance on the Tatar example, they clearly intended to aid in the Turkmenification of the language.
linguistic terminology. This reform was a comprehensive approach to orthographic codification, however it was not perfect. The vowel symbols had been increased and long [u], [ü], [i], [y] were distinguished, but [o], [ö] inexplicably were not.

The Commission accepted Geldiew’s alphabet although they altered it slightly apparently in an effort to lessen the differences between it and the alphabets of other Turkic groups. Geldiew explained in one particularly pointed spelling rule, that despite the spoken Turkmen language’s clear distinction of the phoneme [g] where “all other Turkic peoples enunciate a [k], Turkmen would write a “k.” The decision acknowledged the distinctiveness of Turkmen vernacular but privileged the Turkmen place in the Turkic cultural continuum. That is, they would retain their pronunciations but in certain cases they would go along with other Turks for the sake of simplification. While Geldiew was the orthographer, the larger entity was making the final decisions about alphabet and its relationship to national identity.

Feud with Garahanow

Geldiew continued his work, now as a member of the Turkmen State Academic Council (GUS—Gosudarstvennyi Uchenyi Soviet), which had been founded by the People’s Commissariat of Education. Literacy and education remained high on Moscow’s agenda even as it organized institutions to facilitate socialism. It was then that the dispute began between Geldiew and Allaguly Garahanow over whether the Turkmen reformed Arabic script should be brought closer to or made more distinct from other Turkic scripts.

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172 Turkmen Ili, 1924, pp. 27-30. Many of these terms are still in use today.
173 “Turkmenlerden basga butin Turk kayymler( peoples, nations)...” in Turkmen Ili, 1924, No. 6-8, p. 111. Geldiew makes a clear distinction between the “Turkmen dili” [the Turkmen language] and “Turk dilleri” [Turkic languages].
174 Garahanow had been a member of the Turkmen Academic Commission for about 6 months.
The original alphabet issue had been the lack of symbols to represent spoken Turkmen. Now, choices in alphabet construction were directly tied to issues of national identity. Two small conferences were held to work out the alphabet issues. Geldiew and Garahanow put forth their views. Geldiew, who was still working closely with Alparow and with an eye on the Tatar reforms, wanted each vowel sound to be represented by a separate sign. Garahanow, who was working closely with Uzbek language reformers, wanted to have only four characters. After these meetings, Geldiew’s alphabet continued to be used in textbooks, but Garahanow’s was used in newspapers and journals.\textsuperscript{175}

After the delimitation of the Central Asian republics in 1924,\textsuperscript{176} some Turkmen expressed interest in creating a new writing system based on the Latin script.\textsuperscript{177} Still the Commission pressed on with the Arabic alphabet reform, an indication that the Turkmen intellectuals were committed to retaining the Arabic script. This point is not a very complicated one. Turkmen were Turks, and Turks had been using the Arabic script for a thousand years. Their literature was written in it, they had been educated in it and they viewed it as a basic element of their Turkic culture. Their decision to reform and Turkify it did not mean that they were rejecting any part of their heritage. Even taking reform a step further to Turkmenify the alphabet by highlighting the regional dialect was not a rejection of the past, but staked a claim on the future—a future that would still be Muslim, but modern and nationally oriented.

Despite agitation for adoption of a Latin-based script, as had taken place in Azerbaijan in 1924, in 1925 the Turkmen Academic Commission announced another reform

\textsuperscript{175} Durdýew, 1995, pp. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{176} GARF f. 3316, o. 18, d. 20, l. 1; o. 42, d. 164, ll. 55-55ob. Protokol No. 4 Presidium Soveta Natsional’nosti SSR, 9 July 1924.
\textsuperscript{177} “Elifba meselesi,” Türkmenistan, 12 January 1925, p. 2.
of the Arabic alphabet. This one aimed to accommodate sounds found in Russian words, which were becoming more and more prevalent in Turkmen. Turkmen intellectuals still had little interest in Latinization. They were willing to work within socialist parameters, but with their script. This willingness comments on the connection between language/alphabet and national identity. The fact that the Turkmen were laboring over the details of their alphabet reform demonstrates the degree to which they viewed their alphabet as a preeminent symbol of their identity. In 1925 Geldiew produced yet another reform proposal, this time, in addition to accommodating Russian words, it solved the problems of depicting long [i], [y] phonemes.

By the mid-1920s Central Asian alphabet reform had grown beyond intellectual circles. Several Party members became strong advocates of abandoning the Arabic script. In 1926, Moscow helped Azerbaijani leaders to organize the First All-Union Turcological Congress in order to work out the Turks’ adoption of a Latin-based script. The Party sought ways to engender cohesion among the Soviet peoples. A unified, international script—Latin—would help smooth the progress of that.

Conclusion

A handful of educated Turkmen approached the twentieth century with a desire to participate in the changing world. Yet, they struggled with questions about their identity and preservation of their heritage. Jadidism advocated both of these and was an attractive approach for Turkmen intellectuals. In the early Soviet period, national identity, as encouraged by korenizatsiia, was heavily dependent upon the ideas developed within the Turkic community during the late-tsarist period. The men who became Turkmen

representatives of the Soviet system had first been Muslim cultural reformers. Thus, while 1917 was a watershed year in Russian politics and government, it did not hold precisely the same meaning for Turkmen culture. This chapter does not dismiss the obvious regional and global effects of the 1917 revolution, but does suggest that we view this event as an occurrence in a period when there was a notable degree of continuity; namely in Turkmen culture. Fundamental ideas about reformulating knowledge in order to preserve Islamic culture traversed the temporal boundary of 1917. Turkmen reformers, active in the late imperial period, carried their efforts over into a new Soviet framework. As Terry Martin’s work demonstrates, korenizatsiia provided a format in which nationals continued work on local cultural production.

In the 1920s, Turkmen elite approached Soviet central policy in a manner that addressed local concerns about culture and identity, even while adapting to a socialist framework. Essentially, they negotiated a space for their local concerns within central state policy. There were several sources of influence on Turkmen reformers, including some very important Russian linguists. However, this study argues that jadidism was a primary influence on Turkmen responses to modernity. Not only the biographies, but more importantly the publications of these Turkmen intellectuals demonstrate that they embarked upon the Soviet era with the aim of building upon jadid era efforts in identity, language symbolism, pedagogy and social reform.

Turkmençeleşdirmek, or Turkmenification, of the Arabic alphabet began during the late-tsarist period. However, work to Turkmenify the alphabet was also accomplished during the early Soviet period in Soviet committees. By the 1920s, reform was simultaneously an undertaking of Turkmen nationals’ interested in advancing a modern Turkmen identity and a
Soviet effort to enhance the building of socialism through nationalization. The two overlapped in their interest to spread literacy, codify languages and enhance education.
CHAPTER 3

Partners to Persecution: Turkmen Intellectuals in Soviet Space, 1926-1936

*Russian will assist in enriching Turkmen.*

The reformed Arabic alphabet in Turkmenistan, as throughout Central Asia, was very much an “internally generated change.” However, the Latinization campaign that followed reflected the Soviet state’s increasingly centralized control over culture. In the years between 1926 and 1936, a movement to replace the Arabic script with a Latin-based script paralleled larger political changes within the Soviet system. Latinization built upon debates that had been taking place for many years, especially among Azerbaijani and Ottomans, so it is difficult sometimes to know if Latinization should be depicted as a local movement or one brought by Soviets. If the Soviets were indigenous, does that make it a domestic movement or a colonial one? In fact, while regional intellectuals were again using alphabet as a marker of modernization, the Soviet political center appropriated their language and turned the writing system into a symbol of and vehicle for socialism. In the process, central power interests in Moscow merged with those of many regional intellectuals, blurring many of the distinctions between center and periphery that are often assumed to be present. The desire to develop mass literacy and universal education aligned Turkmen efforts with those of Russian/Soviet linguists. The two groups initially became partners in Latinization. Their interests and works diverged in the 1930s, however, when political shifts emanating from


180 Term used by Fierman, 1991, chapter 3, to describe Arabic alphabet reform.
from the center led to mass persecutions and purges throughout the USSR. 1936 saw
dramatic changes take place in access to and forms of power, not least of which involved
purges. It also marked the beginning of the end of Latinization as Moscow introduced the
Cyrillic script, in an effort to impose centralization and to reduce local cultural autonomy.

Language planning (iazykoe stroitelstvo) was critical to the massive social shift
Moscow sponsored because it provided a practical means of raising literacy, educating the
population, and creating national cadres to build socialism.\textsuperscript{181} Turkmen language planners
became involved in Latinization as part of the phenomenon of alphabet change that swept
across the USSR’s Muslim communities. In the 1920s, alphabet reform transformed from a
project designed by Turkmen to advance the Muslim community to a project led by Moscow
aimed at promoting international socialism. While the campaign to Romanize Turkic
alphabets began with a high degree of willingness to compromise on the part of most
academics, Moscow began tightening its oversight in the late 1920s. In the 1910s and 1920s,
Turkmen intellectuals were not limited by a simple, diachronic relationship between a central
power and a peripheral group. Rather, in the early 1920s, Turkmen initiatives in education
and language merged with Bolshevik cultural endeavors. The era of korenizatsiia was one in
which Turkmen were constantly negotiating the relationship between their intentions and the
boundaries Moscow laid down to keep nationals in line with Party goals. Like locals
throughout the USSR, Turkmen intellectuals pursued many of the social and cultural goals
they had identified prior to 1917—for example, modernization of education and developing
mass literacy—only now they did it within parameters set by Moscow.

From 1928 to 1939 Turkmen employed a Latin-based alphabet that was devised
within the larger project of Sovietization, sparked by the 1926 conference in Baku. Despite

\textsuperscript{181} GARF f. 3316, o. 13, d. 10, l. 194.
all other political pressures and daily exigencies, Turkmen cultural reformers’ priorities remained largely as they had during the *jadid* period, shifting only when political circumstances forced them to do so.182 As with so many developments during the Soviet era, Latinization took place in a complex atmosphere of academic and political debate. Reform was not achieved through central fiat, but rather delegated via several layers of scholars and administrators who fought for it, adapted it, and usually implemented it over multiple years. Most salient is that while the central Soviet power in Moscow controlled a great deal, the periphery also had a certain measure of power over the way Moscow’s plans were executed. Decision-making was multi-dimensional, involving intellectual, politicians, teachers, print journalists, censors, and textbook authors throughout the USSR.183

This chapter ends in 1936 because in that year the Cyrillic alphabet began to replace the Latin. It was a symbolic act that underscored more material and ideological changes within the Soviet system. In the 1930s, the Soviet state persecuted such Turkmen intellectuals as Muhammed Geldiew and Kümşaly Böriew as “nationalists” and “enemies of the state.” The elimination of progressives dramatically changed the face of Turkmen cultural development. Rather than vehicles for Turkmen modernization, language and education suddenly became tools for building an increasingly Russified “Soviet” culture. By the mid-1930s, national initiatives that had not folded into the Soviet backdrop were erased by purges.184

The Bolsheviks fought their battles for socialism on multiple fronts. The ideological front was most concerned with employing culture to build socialism [*sotsialisticheskoe*}

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182 *Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma vsesoiznogo tsentral’ogo komiteta novogo tiurkskogo alfavita, zasedavshego v g. Tashkent ot 7-go do 12-e ianvaria 1928 goda* (Baku, 1929), p. 139.
184 Martin, 2001, p. 17, 25 (1933)
stroitel'stvo]. 185 “In enlightenment of the masses, actions of Soviet power and general questions are related to building socialism. 186 In addition to the Party’s political and military fronts, in the waning years of the Civil War, the Bolsheviks declared the cultural arena to be the “third battlefront.” 187 The liquidation of illiteracy [likvidatsiia bezgramotnost’] was a primary goal in this fight.

Activities on the cultural front were not simply fiats from above or central directives but a chaotic mix of central policy and many layers of bureaucracy and academe that were in a chronic state of contestation with each other. 188 In alphabet reform, the Turkmen revealed themselves to be fairly moderate and cooperative. They did not resist Latinization, but also made clear that they were not interested in working on Latinization until the central government issued a directive. Turkmen asserted their identity through language. An early Latin script textbook, Turkmen Language Grammar, wrote

For every national group there is one marker that is the most important—language. Throughout the world, every people has its own mother tongue. Our mother tongue is the Turkmen language… 189

Even though central institutions pushed for all Turks to use one “unified” alphabet Turkmen consistently reported that they could not possibly live, or represent their dialect, without all of their exceptional long vowels (see chapter 2). Unification was never fully realized due to just such arguments.

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186 First All-Turkmen ..1925, p. 31.
187 David-Fox, 1997, p. 3.
188 Smith, Edgars, Hirsch, Keller, Laura, This is one example of how the Soviet peripheries had the power to influence the contours of centrally sponsored activities.
189 Geldiew and Alparow, Türkmen diliň grammatykası (Aşgabat; Türkmenistan Döwlet Neşiraty, 1929), p. 11. The authors plainly explain how the common Turkic language that was once shared evolved into many dialects with different historical experiences and the vast geographic spread of peoples.
**Korenizatsiia**

A constant concern of the Bolsheviks was how to instigate socialism through class struggle and modernity through enlightenment, without inciting nationalist sentiment. This was despite their view of the national experience as an unavoidable one that all peoples must pass through. Eager to counter the potential aggressiveness nationalism could invoke, some Bolsheviks, notably Lenin and Stalin, sought to disarm the threat through a policy of *korenizatsiia* or “nativization”.190 *Korenizatsiia* comes from the Russian word “to root” and could literally be translated as “enrooting” which aptly connotes aspirations to burrow into regional life, planting the roots of socialism, and enticing local cadres to join in building socialism.

By allowing for “forms” of nationhood, some Bolsheviks believed they could quicken the emergence of “class cleavages” and encourage the peasants and proletariat of the various peoples to join in the building of socialism.191 National concessions included music, folklore, literature, and costumes, in addition to the national territory and language.192 National identity survived in one form or another throughout the Soviet era, while “content” was increasingly socialized.193

Bolshevik concerns were not limited to the potential nationalisms in the periphery, but focused even more on the danger of Russian nationalism, or as Stalin called it “Great Russian chauvinism.”194 Hoping that management of the national republics by local cadres would allay potential bitterness toward the new government being centralized in Moscow and

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190 In 1923 the twelfth party congress formally addressed questions concerning the numerous national minorities.
192 Audrey Altstadt, Ayşe Rorlich, Edward Allworth.
distance it from its imperial, tsarist predecessor, party members promoted national languages and national elites in each national territory. Moreover, the party advocated the replacement of Europeans of the Russian empire with indigenous leaders. Korenizatsiia called for the building of local cadres. The state intended to employ educated and skilled natives to carry out party policy as well as to train a new generation of skilled workers. Circumstances forced the Bolsheviks to rely on bourgeois national representatives until loyal communists were qualified to take over. In this way, local Turkmen efforts, such as language reform and modernization of schools, overlapped both ideologically and materially with Bolshevik plans.

Bolshevik aspirations to propel the revolution into the realms of culture, science, education, and ideology drew attention to minority languages. “Enlightenment,” an important component in training the masses to fulfill their role in modernity, required educators that could impart the ideas of socialism in their native language. It also required standardized, codified languages. The faster that languages were standardized, books were printed and people became literate, the faster they could acquire the knowledge necessary for building socialism. Korenizatsiia promised equality of rights for all the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union through local economic initiatives and the promotion of native cadres. It provided them with the rights to language use and with financial and administrative patronage for the development of their press and publications, cultural organizations and educational establishments.”

195 Helene Carrere d’Encasse, Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt, 1980, pp. 24-25. 196 Vtoroi S’ezd Sovetov TSSR. (26 marta-3 aprelia 1927). Stenograficheskii otchet. (Ashkhabad: TGI, 1927), pp. 4-5. Michael Smith notes that the Bolsheviks even developed a policy of reciprocal bilingualism, which stated that all “European” public officials in the provinces or republics should learn the local language. 197 David-Fox, 1997, p. 3. 198 Clement, 1999, p. 42. 199 Smith, p. 46.
and TsIK of the Turkestan SSR recognized Uzbek, Kirgiz (Kazak) and Turkmen as languages with status equal to Russian in their respective republics. The desire to see the many national cultures evolve into one socialist culture was the ultimate Bolshevik goal, but until enough people were literate in the basic tenets of socialism to assist in its construction, support would have to be shown to the national minorities, especially in education and language.

In the early 1920s, language was representative of larger political objectives. It was also a material tool for carrying out policy. Korenizatsiia aimed to build up the titular national culture and language, but it also targeted minorities within each republic, lest they feel oppressed by the majority. In 1925 the Turkmen Revolutionary Committee declared Turkmen and Russian the state languages of the TSSR. Central organs were to conduct all correspondence in both state languages—“in parallel.” Large urban centers like Merv and Poltoratsk oblasts would correspond with central organs in the parallel fashion (Russian and Turkmen), but were to communicate with lower apparatuses in the language of the native population. A hierarchy of language use was being institutionalized. Kerki, Charjew, and Tashouz oblasts would conduct all official correspondence in Turkmen. Records in villages and districts were to be in the language of the predominant population, that is national minorities. A region with an Uzbek majority was to keep records in Uzbek; regions with a European population would accordingly keep records in that European language. In these ways, korenizatsiia was more than nation building—it brought the fragments of the “nation”

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200 Smith, p. 46 fn. 35; GARF f. 1235, o. 118, d. 1, ll. 117, 131. 1923 SNK RSFSR pays for translation of documents in Turk republics in the local languages. Fond 130, o. 7, d. 147, ll. 234, 260
201 First All-Turkmen Congress of Soviet Workers, Peasants, and Red Army Deputies, 14-24 February 1925, pp. 3-30.
under an overarching titular language, culture, administration and school system, even while acknowledging the nuances, for example, of Kurdish, Baluchi, and Jemshid, culture.

The Bolsheviks viewed korenizatsiia as a temporary measure, but the difference of opinion centered on how long the measure would last. Lenin predicted that it would last for some time, while Zinoviev and Stanislav Pestkovskii expressed their disdain for such “temporary, if necessary, evils” as korenizatsiia and the New Economic Policy [NEP].

Korenizatsiia lasted for more than a decade, longer than many party members had hoped. Its longevity was no doubt due to Stalin, its greatest and most formidable patron.

Literacy and Enlightenment

Korenizatsiia allowed Turkmen intellectuals who had been active as jadids to continue their work in “perfecting” the Turkmen writing system. Although all efforts eventually fell under the Soviet administration, Turkmen alphabet reformers continued to believe Türkmençeleşdirmek, or “Turkmenification” of the lexicon and script to accurately reflect the spoken language would increase national literacy. Schools were also a necessary feature of reform. Despite budgetary concerns, Turkmen encouraged “speeding up the question [of literacy] and undertaking all measures to develop village schools for children and likbez (likvidatsiia bezgramotnotsi—liquidation of illiteracy) schools for adults.”

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202 Martin, 2001, p. 20. Enlightenment and literacy became part of the Bolshevization of life and were institutionalized in the era of the New Economic Policy. Much Sovietization took place during the years of the NEP, but this was not because of anything intrinsic to NEP, rather it was a coincidence of timing. Just as language reform and literacy programs did not coincide perfectly with NEP, neither were they restricted by the parameters of the 1928-1932 first five-year plan. Katerina Clark, “The “Quiet Revolution” in Intellectual Life,” Fitzpatrick, et al. eds, 1991, p. 212. Fitzpatrick, Rabinowitch and Stites, eds. Russia in the era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).


204 Clement, 1999, pp. 43-44.

205 First All-Turkmen, 1925, p. 33.
Turkmen language planners expected swift alphabet acquisition among Turkmen because in their estimated one-million population only about 2-5% already possessed literacy skills. This meant that Latinization would coincide with the spread of literacy.\textsuperscript{206} The assumption that low literacy would allow Latinization proceed at a “rapid tempo” was due to perception that few individuals were invested in the Arabic script.\textsuperscript{207}

Raising popular levels of literacy or the “liquidation of illiteracy” was an important part of the “cultural front.” The Bolsheviks wanted not only to engender political support among the mass population they also wished to see sincerely committed socialists. Although the revolutionaries saw violent methods as useful, Lenin’s philosophy about using carrots rather than sticks prevailed and force was not the primary approach for developing enlightenment or literacy. This allowed some individuals, who may not have supported violent measures, to participate actively in the new system. It also made room for phasing out old systems rather than just crushing them with one blow. They would “liquidate the world order” by “gradually undermining it.”\textsuperscript{208} As one Turkmen explained at a meeting of the Turkmen Soviet:

When I was in Kerki, I heard rumors that the Soviet power will forbid and destroy old method schools [mektebs] and arrest the mollas. We do not support this solution of destroying old schools. We strive to spread literacy among the people. Of course, in comparison with old method schools, new method, Soviet schools give students greater knowledge, but we don’t have enough new schools for the population. The solution is not to close old schools and arrest teachers, but to erect new Soviet schools alongside them. And, only that path—without arrests—will win sympathy for the Soviet schools.\textsuperscript{209}

\textsuperscript{206} While this is far from proven, it is a common assumption. Fierman, 1991, p. 97 puts forth this idea specific to Uzbeks. It is similarly asserted as the key to the success of Latinization in the Turkish Republic, 1928.

\textsuperscript{207} Pervyi vse turkmenskii s’ezd sovetov rabochikh, dekhanskikh i krasno armeiskikh deputatov. Stenograficheski otchet, 1925, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{208} Pervyi vse turkmenskii s’ezd sovetov rabochikh, dekhanskikh i krasno armeiskikh deputatov. Stenograficheski otchet, 1925, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{209} First All-Turkmen Congress of Soviet Workers, Peasants, and Red Army Deputies, 14-24 February 1925, p. 33. A point of confusion arises with the Soviets’ use of “new method/old method” schools. In contrast to local usage of “new method” to describe jadid schools, in Soviet parlance “new” meant Soviet.
At the same meeting, another addressed the influence of remaining mektebs and identifies
approaches to bringing class warfare into the schools. Especially bringing working class
children to it.

We do not have exact calculations of how many confessional schools
exist…but they are in decline…this means that they can not spread, yet the presence
of them in the indicated districts explains the absence of Soviet schools…in Lenin
oblast there remain around 40, in Kerki around 50…We are not preparing to
undertake repressive measures against confessional schools. We will advise them and
gradually train the instructors.

[city schools] serve, primarily, children of service providers and workers.
According to statistics, children of the non-worker element make up 8-12% of
students; those of workers equal 90%. In these schools we have undertaken the
principle of tuition payments. Tuition is a temporary measure, which will be
employed while we have weak local budgets…we need to free at least 50% of the
workers’ children from tuition payment.210

Bolsheviks believed that enlightenment (prosveshchenie/bilimlilik), education
(obrazovanie/magaryf), and upbringing/learning (vospitanie/terbiýe) would create a society
“literate” in socialism.211 Sometimes “political literacy” was specified, but typically
“literacy” was understood to be reading and writing more broadly.212 The development of
socialist culture among the Turkmen population was the key to “building a socialized
state.”213

Illiteracy became an enemy of the state. The All-Union Extraordinary Commission
for the Liquidation of Illiteracy organized a campaign to eradicate illiteracy from Soviet
territory.214 This anti-illiteracy society was responsible for the production of practical

210 First All-Turkmen Congress, 1925, p. 70.
211 Michael David-Fox, Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929 (Ithaca:
Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 4
212 Sovnats TsIK SSSR called for courses to train teachers in the new alphabet as well as to support the political
literacy of workers. GARF f. 3316, o. 42, d. 164, ll. 78-79; o. 21,
213 Vtoroi S’ezd Sovetov TSSR (26 marta-3 aprelia 1927). Stenograficheskii otchet. (Ashkhabad: Turkmenskoe
teaching materials: textbooks, teacher training, and activities to arouse public interest.

Permission, funding, and ideological guidance (propaganda) were to originate in the center, in Moscow. But the party expected local representatives to oversee the intricacies of enlightenment: teacher-training, publishing textbooks and newspapers, and liquidation of illiteracy. As early as 1918, printing and education departments were created within Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats) to supply vernacular language materials to non-Russian peoples. “Likbez” became an adjective to describe schools established for adult literacy, as well as a cultural war cry.

In addition to the “internationalization” fervor, the idea of bringing the Soviet people together (sblizhenie) was culturally and politically paramount. In 1919, the Ministry of Education (Narkompros) suggested that Latinization of the Russian and Arabic scripts of the [former] empire would encourage the sblizhenie of the people. In the layers of identity available to the myriad of Soviet peoples, the shared “Soviet” identity would be primary, before Muslim, Turkestani, or Siberian or other.

Cyrillization did not yet seem feasible as bitterness toward the Russian Imperial policies and resistance to things Russian lingered among the peoples who had been under Russian imperial rule. Yet, the powerful symbolism of alphabets let the Soviet leaders to pursue some form of change. Moscow viewed the Arabic script as synonymous with pan-Turkist and pan-Islamic sentiment that threatened the advancement of socialism. Arabic scripts were also considered to be “backward;” while the Latin script was seen as a marker of

215 GARF f. 3316, o. 21, d. 902, ll. 1-2ob. (1928) organize theoretical conf. The TsIK SSSR was, for example, responsible for ordering all medical personal to adopt the latin script, for ordering poligraphical material and typewriters from abroad, publishing laws in the new script. GARF f. 3316, o. 13, d. 11, ll. 197-198.
216 Clement, 1999, p. 42.
217 Smith, p. 104-5.
218 Yuri Slezkine, communal apartment…
modernity and progress. Newspaper articles explained that not only was there a lack of vowel representation, but also that the script was written from right to left while the numerals were written from left to right, making their simultaneous usage cumbersome. There were also arguments that the Arabic script was exceedingly difficult to learn and that it was the largest factor in widespread illiteracy among the “eastern peoples.” “Latinists” repeatedly noted the superiority of the Latin script’s “international” character.

The power of alphabets drew political involvement from all corners of the USSR. Still, many Turkic intellectuals had just begun to make headway with their reformed Arabic scripts. Most Central Asians had no interest in abandoning those efforts until central powers made Latinization a central policy. Until 1926, local language reformers rejected arguments that Latin writing was superior and insisted that the Arabic system had the ability to represent the necessary vowel sounds. Writing from right to left was merely habitual and a poor reason to condemn a script. Moreover, opponents of Latinization argued against its “international” character noting that “Chinese, Hindus, Hebrews and Negroes” did not use it.

_Alphabetic bullets_

The generally militaristic attitude of the revolutionaries encouraged an aggressive approach to the role of culture in Soviet society. Alphabet was the obvious weapon in the

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219 Terry Martin, 2001, provides the best explanation and historical overview of “cultural backwardness” (kul’turno-ostalost’) as it applied to the Soviet “east” and “west.” See especially chapter 4.


221 The Japanese experience refutes the validity of this propaganda and implies that literacy problems lie not with script but with social programs. Avram Galanti, “Arap ve Japon Yazıları,” Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Alfabe Tartışmaları, Hüseyin Yorulmaz, ed. (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1995), pp. 150-156.

222 Fierman, 1991, p. 76.

223 Fierman, 1991, p. 79.
“attack against illiteracy.” The revolutionaries’ militant language is found in the opening remarks of the First Turcological Congress.

This session is beginning a great presentation, a great attack of the revolutionary battalions of Turco-Tatar peoples against the Gibraltar and Port Arthur of obscurantism and ignorance which hinder the liquidation of illiteracy and the dissemination of enlightenment among the people.224

Letters, the building blocks of alphabetic literacy, would provide the foundation for an “enlightened” socialist society.225 Accordingly, the Communist Party and local soviets began serious work to eliminate majority illiteracy. The first years of Bolshevik rule emphasized the revolutionaries’ vision of socialism as a modern, international effort, and the need to assume an international character in preparation of spreading the revolution. Russian scholars even discussed the possibility of Latinizing Russian. Although this was ultimately rejected, suggestions to Latinize Muslim people’s scripts persisted.226 Since several Azerbaijani and some Ottoman intellectuals had already proposed it themselves, Moscow did not have to plant the seeds, but simply water the budding ideas.227

In the Russian empire, Tatars held sway as the Turco-Muslim group with significant influence both culturally and politically. Many years of contact, since the Mongol excursions of the thirteenth century, developed their reputation among Russians. With a print culture that developed earlier than that of other Turkic groups, Tatar ideas were broadly disseminated. This cultural power threatened Russia and over the centuries policies aimed to undermine the Tatar hegemony. For example, Il’inetskii (chapter 2) designed his program to

224 Pervyi Vsesoiznnyi, 1926, p. 11.
226 See Smith, 1998, chapter 5, for excellent coverage of spelling reforms initiated by the Provincial Government and proposals to Latinize the Russian language.
develop literacy in native dialects such as Kazakh specifically to overtake Tatar influences.

In the Soviet era Tatars lost this position of influence and the Azerbaijanis won it.

Azerbaijani Turks: Pioneers of Latinization

Historians credit Azerbaijani cultural leaders with having been the “pioneers” of Latinization, as they were among the first to identify the western script as a tool for attaining modernization.²²⁸ Just as several jadids had earlier, the Latinizers located their issue within a larger global experience. They placed Central Asia firmly within the Muslim world and the emerging socialist world, but also situated it within the larger modernizing world. In the end, the arguments reveal similarities, each encouraging a respective alphabet change as a means to finding accord with a world community. This is one of the striking intellectual continuities between political eras.

After 1917, Soviet Azerbaijanis took the side of Latinizers in the “existing debate” over alphabet reform,²²⁹ eventually forming the Azerbaijani Committee for the New Turkic Alphabet (AzKNTA). The Azeri revolutionary Samedaga Agamalyoglu led its members in a five-year long campaign for a meeting at which they could address the issue formally.²³⁰ He sought official support for Latinization, going so far as to bring the issue to Lenin directly in 1922. Agamalyoglu, who later became chairman of the All-Union Central Executive Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet (VTsIK NTA), was a tireless advocate of

²³⁰ Michael Smith, p. 126. The 1920s saw the first formal attempts to bring a Latin-based script to Soviet peoples, but this was not a new concept among Turks or Russians. As early as 1918, the Yakuts were the first to decide on a Latin based script (introduced by Orthodox missionaries), however, geographic remoteness and religious differences prevented them from having much influence on other Turks. Şimşir, 1992, p. 97-98.
Latinization, announcing “the Arabic alphabet [as] an instrument of the old Muslim culture, while the Latin alphabet was a tool of the new socialist one.” Securing Lenin’s support, the Azerbaijan TsIK adopted the Latin script in summer 1924.

Prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals addressed the importance of alphabet both as a political issue and one of great human interest. The chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Azerbaijani S.S.R., Nariman Narimanov, and Mamed Aga Shakhtatinskii, editor of the Azerbaijani newspaper Şarqi Rus, were two notable Azeris who published their views against the Arabic script in Zhizn’ Natsional’ nostei (Life of the Nationalities), the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities’ (Narkomnats) newspaper.

A member of the original AzKNTA, Shakhtatinski’s manuscript “On the Light of the Latin Alphabet” illuminated the orientation of Latinizers.

The Muslim world needs an international alphabet. The Latin alphabet is not only international; but it is pananthropic. It is known [even] to those peoples, like Russians, which do not use it. The Latin alphabet is known even by educated Muslims in Asia and Africa.

What needs to be done? It is very simple, it is necessary to replace the Arabic alphabet with the Latin, because it is agreeable for us Muslims as it is for the whole world… Latin writing [should become the basis for the] daily alphabet.

As is often the case with language reform, Latinization was a political movement shaped by extra-code (non-language) factors as much as by linguistic ones. Letters were tools for building a modern culture.

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234 From Shakhtatinskii’s manuscript, “On Latinization,” GARF, fond 1318, op. 1, d. 1700, ll. 47-145.
Michael Smith writes that most Bolsheviks avoided the topic of Latinization for fear of “inciting opposition among devout Muslims.” Yet, he contradicts this by noting that the Party’s official role began as early as January 1923 when the Commission for Reform of the Arabic Script was created within Peoples Commissariat of Nationalities (*Narkomnats*).\(^{236}\) Smith explains that the commission’s task, despite the irony of its title, was to oversee a move away from the Arabic script union-wide.

By supporting [alphabet movements in Azerbaijan and the Caucasus], the party appeared to promote nativization policy, giving peoples new or revised alphabets designed for mass literacy and education. Yet Latinization also offered Moscow the perfect opportunity to begin to undermine the power of the Muslim clerical establishment...forcing Latin as the new medium of script literacy, the party would mount an impassable barrier between traditional Islamic print culture and the masses of the new “Soviet” literates. Since the vast majorities of the Turkic and indigenous populations of the east were still illiterate, control over alphabet politics meant control over them.\(^{237}\)

The Committee actually accomplished very little and produced a final report expressing hopelessness for the potential of timely reform.\(^{238}\) Nonetheless, archival documents and Smith’s sophisticated analysis show that the central government continued to view influence, symbolic and material, over writing and literacy as a valuable arrow to have in its quiver.

Official sanction of script reform turned the Azerbaijani endeavor into an overtly Soviet goal and one intended to consolidate Muslims with a socialist culture. While there is strong evidence that Bolsheviks at the center hoped to free the proletariat from the Arabic script, the policy history suggests that they were willing to undertake the change in stages. For example, the early 1920s the degree of cooperation on both sides was such that the

\(^{236}\) GARF f. 1318, o. 1, d. 1699, ll. 2,6,8,9.  
\(^{238}\) GARF f. 1318, o. 1, d. 1700, ll. 2-11.
Commission agreed to allow mollas to teach Islam in Soviet schools, despite the party’s continuing fears about the influence of “dogmatic teachings in mosques.”

**The 1926 Turcological Congress**

As the Azerbaijanis undertook Latinization, a debate ensued in the union-wide papers *Novyi Vostok* and *Zhizn’ Natsional’nosteii* over whether the adoption of Latin script should be considered more widely and if so, how and when. In the midst of the flurry of opinions, the All-Union Scientific Association of Oriental Studies (*Vsesoiuznoi Nauchnoi Assotsiatsiei Vostokovedeniia*) suggested that an ‘unofficial’ All-Union Turcology conference should be organized. Official, public records depict the meeting that ensued in 1926 as academic in nature. Although paid for by Moscow, the Party endeavored to downplay official involvement. And while the conference did exhibit lively debate about issues of alphabet, language and potential threats to Turkic literary tradition, Soviet and Turkish archival documents also reveal a high degree of official organization and management of the academic conference.

The 1926 Turcological congress was the turning point in the history of Latinization. From 26 February through 5 March 1926 linguists and Turcologists from around the Turkic world met in Baku, Azerbaijan to discuss the possibility of replacing

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239 GARF, f. 1318, o. 1, d. 1698, ll. 1-7.
240 A. Samoilovich, “Novyi turetskii alfavit,” *Novyi vostok*, no. 5, 1924, p. 390. In the battles to build socialism newspapers and journals were important weapons in the Soviet arsenal. GARF, f. 1318, o. 1, d. 1697, l. 11. (1923).
241 GARF f. 5409, o. 1, d. 109; RGASPI f. 17, o. 113, d. 169, ll. 5, 180-185.
243 GARF f. 5409, o. 1, d. 109; Şimşir, 1992.
244 The Soviet Turks decided upon Latinization before those in the Turkish Republic did. Records from the fractional meeting show that the Soviets knew at this time, through the representative of the Turkish Ministry of Education, Köprülüzade who attended the 1926 congress, that Turkey was thinking about changing its writing from Arabic but that she had not yet decided precisely which script it would choose. GARF f. 5409, o. 1, d. 109, l. 58.
Arabic writing with a Latin-based script.\textsuperscript{245} Linguists in Moscow and Baku had discussed Latinization for several years before this meeting, but this meeting began the formal, and very public, union-wide Latinization project. Most in attendance advocated for Latinization; only a handful of Tatars were anti-Latin in defense of their long established print tradition.\textsuperscript{246} Despite the enormity of the question, the decision to adopt a Latin-based script went much more smoothly than the actual implementation of it. The next thirteen years saw multiple conferences, struggles for linguistic control and political power, shortage of materials such as paper and typeset, and political purges. Latinization involved far more than the representation of speech in text.

Stalin had made clear that he did not want any kind of permanent institute or organ to emerge from the 1926 Baku congress.\textsuperscript{247} He expected the educational commissariats in each republic to handle their respective Latinization projects. This was in keeping with the Soviet nationalities policy that directed all educational and government work to be carried out in the native language.\textsuperscript{248} Despite this clear directive, the Azerbaijani leadership pushed for just such an organ and established the All-Union Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet. Moscow allowed Baku to steer Turkic language planning in part because the central power saw the Azeris as an alternative influence to the Tatars among Turks. However, there is evidence suggesting that Moscow never intended Baku to become an autonomous source of policy or initiative. Nevertheless, as the central government allowed the Baku leaders a wide

\textsuperscript{245} Terry Martin uses the term “spontaneous” to describe latinization, but the history shows that it was a long process with many influences. Martin, 2001, p. 185. For example, see GARF f. 1318, o. 1, d. 1699, l. 2.
\textsuperscript{246} Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi, 1926, pp. 277-80, 288-89, 305-09.
\textsuperscript{247} Terry Martin, p. 187; Smith, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{248} Terry Martin, p. 185.
berth in the initial heady days of Latinization, Agamalyoglu and the other planners attained significant influence over Muslim culture USSR-wide.249

Orthography was a major topic at the 1926 congress, occupying the entirety of the Sixth and Seventh sessions—and part of 8-11. The discussion shows that Russian scholars shared the Turkmen desire to implement a phonetic writing system. The Russian linguist from St. Petersburg, Lev Vladimirovich Shcherba, asserted “Words should be written as pronounced.” He also made a distinction between “script” (a writing system) and “alphabet” (letters that employed in a writing system) to underscore the difference between a writing system and a spelling system (orthography).250 It was the spelling of a word, the choice of letters in combination that would allow readers to recognize a word based on their knowledge of the spoken language, he argued. Lev Ivanovich Zhirkov, professor of Oriental Studies at the VNAV in Moscow, concurred. He advocated for the phonetic principle, especially to accommodate words of Persian and Arabic origin.251 Farhad Rahimoglu Agazade, from the Azerbaijani Central Executive Committee, added that European words also needed to be addressed, they ought to “nationalize according to the rules of Turkic [languages].”252 These points continued to occupy language reformers for decades after the 1926 conference and in fact were the impetus for later such conferences (1928, 1929, 1931, 1932, 1935, 1954).

Individual Turks, especially Tatars who feared for their long literary heritage and printing tradition and Kazakhs who felt they had made great progress with their reformed Arabic script, vocalized preference to continue with Arabic script reform. But, there was no

250 L. B. Sherba, “Osnovnye printsipy orfografii i ikh sotsial'noe znachenie,” Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi, 1926, pp. 157-161; also takes a patronizing tone insisting that the example of the “cultured” Russian language can lead the Turks in the perfection of their languages, p. 176.
252 Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi, 1926, p. 166.
overt resistance to Latinization among Turkmen.\textsuperscript{253} In fact, Turkmen intellectuals embodied the degree of cooperation exhibited by Central Asian Turks more generally. That is, the Arabic alphabet was still an important marker of Turco-Muslim identity. Berdiew, representing the Turkmen Ministry of Education, used a hat metaphor to make clear his position on script change. Likening it to a simple change of outfit he suggested, “Yesterday I was dressed differently. Today I am wearing a hat. But do you not recognize me?”\textsuperscript{254} He implied a support for Latinization in an unpassionate manner. But, his support for Latinization did not make a great impact on the audience because as soon as he made his point the moderator told him that the conference had already determined the alphabet question! Apologizing, Berdiew moved on to the question of literary language.

At the two week long congress, the main question of whether a Latin script should be adopted in place of the Arabic scripts was accompanied by a host of other pressing linguistic questions.\textsuperscript{255} Representatives from a variety of regions identified other points of immediate practical importance such as the question of terminology development, liquidation of illiteracy, instruction in schools in the native tongue, and translation of textbooks into local languages. Not whether they would Latinize, but how they would do it uniformly became the overriding theoretical as well as practical question in the form of “unification.”\textsuperscript{256}

“Unification” of a Turkic literary language had been a point of interest among some Turks since before Gasprinskii suggested it in the 1880s (see chapter 2). Turkic languages are mutually intelligible. However, wide geographic distances between groups and varied historical experiences (such as membership in a Mongol state, the Khivan Khanate or the

\textsuperscript{253} Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi, 1926, pp. 167-170.
\textsuperscript{254} Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi, 1926, p. 327.
\textsuperscript{255} Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi, 1926, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{256} M. Şahmyradow, “Dil hem imla gurultaý,” Türkmenistan, 7 October 1925, p. 1.
Bukharan Emirate) led to distinct vocabularies and pronunciations. That they could understand one another was not at issue, but rather how they should represent these distinct speeches in official writing. In developing literary languages, in codifying a modern form of speech, Turks had to decide upon spellings and which terms to include in dictionaries. Newspapers, textbooks and official documents needed to depict a standardized language in order to facilitate teaching literacy. In devising a Latin-based alphabet, the Turkic groups had to chose whether they would all employ the same letters in a “unified” or “common” (Turkmen—umumy) script. Bekki Berdiew, a Turkmen representative, argued that local peculiarities must be included in literary languages. Thus, there could be no one unified literary language, despite the degree of mutual intelligibility between all dialects. He underscored the importance of local particulars to identity of a speech community, noting that a literary language is not the same as the popular patois and that “there could not be a common language among Turkic peoples. Language is one thing; dialect is another.”

Standardization and unification were not synonymous. Standardized languages were modern; unified languages could obscure local identity and incite pan-Turkism.

_The Turkmen view of the 1926 Baku Congress_

When discussions about Latinization began, Geldiew and the Turkmen Academic Commission were working on a reformed Arabic script (see chapter 2). They had not yet finished work on the Muslim writing system and orthography when a new form of modernity—Latinization—confronted them. Nevertheless, Geldiew, Bekki E. Berdiew, Başım Perengliew, and Şamurdow attended the 1926 Baku congress as representatives of Turkmenistan’s Ministry of Education (Narkompros). Başım Kul’besherow was there as a representative of the Central Executive Committee of the SSR.

Aside from the speeches available from the stenographic record of the 1926 congress (see above) there is a summary of the congress and the general aims of Latinization from a report made to the Turkmen party leadership in the same year. This document explains the Turkmen elite’s understanding of linguistic points and the goals they identified to the Turkmen political leadership.

Several underlying principles were consistent throughout the fourteen years of the Latinization process—and several also sustained jadid concerns. The first was that literacy was the key to enlightenment that would automatically engender a responsible, modern citizenship. The second, “internationalism” and the goal of making the alphabet suitable to the greatest number of “masses.”\textsuperscript{258} The third was that the standard method of Latinization was to be based on the “phonetic principle”: one phoneme to be represented by one grapheme.\textsuperscript{259} Additionally, Moscow intended to depend on the local intelligentsia to implement reform appropriate to their speech community, even though the ultimate goal was to design a common Turkic alphabet. These latter two combined when, after the 1926 conference, each republican alphabet committee began to develop its own alphabet project and submit proposals to Agamalyoglu’s “Azerbaijani committee.” The Azeris were then to compare the alphabet projects they had received and publish a table of all the letters indicating the differences between projects. At the “core” of these efforts was the intent to design an alphabet that would support every, or as many as possible, Turkic-Tatar dialects.\textsuperscript{260}

The Russian linguist Iakovlev outlined this principle at the Turcological Congress, suggesting an inevitable predominance of the phonetic method in designing Turkic

\textsuperscript{258} Polozhenie—Position of the Soviet Workers, Peasants and Red Army Deputies of TSSR, from the District and Regional meeting of the Central Committee and presidium (Ashgabat: TsIK TSSR, 1926), p. 17.

\textsuperscript{259} Polozhenie, 1926, p. 16, 26.

\textsuperscript{260} Polozhenie, 1926, p. 10.
orthographies. Shakhtakhtinskii also supported his anti-Arabic script stance with a phonological argument. Nevertheless, divergent positions were seen among Latinists. For example, there were two basic views regarding how to choose the letters for the new Latin alphabet. One proposed creating an alphabet based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (itself based on the Latin of the French School of Phonetics). The second suggested distilling the many marks and letters of all Latin alphabets down to one. In the end, they opted for a third alternative: the alphabet was to be designed from a combination of the common Latin alphabet, Latin letters with “marks” (cedillas, diacritics), Russian letters, and newly created letters, based on Latin.

After the 1926 decision to introduce the new Latin-based Turkic alphabet, Soviet Turks formed a Scientific Council, headed by Agamalyoglu in Baku, to work on introduction of the new alphabet and prepare materials to send locals. The Scientific Council’s work, in agreement with the 7 March 1926 resolution of the Baku congress, was guided by the following considerations:

1. To introduce the alphabet chart, not as a project that was proposed by one individual, but as one advanced by the academic center [in coordination] with state and community institutions.
2. To show in the chart, those letters exhibiting differences [between dialects].
3. Render sounds characteristic of all or most dialects of the Turkic-Tatar language family with common letters. But, the representation of distinctive sounds found only in a few dialects was to be left to locals.

Thus, Agamalyoglu’s Scientific Soviet set out to create a mailing for the republican centers. But it appears that it was delayed because of continuing quarrels among members

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262 GARF, fond 1318, op. 1, d. 1700, ll. 92.
263 Polozhenie, 1926, pp. 18-22.
264 Stenograficheskii otchet, 1926.
265 Polozhenie, 1926, p. 6.
over questions of modifications and the degree to which the Azeri alphabet should act as a model for the other Turkic groups. Due to this infighting, all basic changes were to be laid aside until all Turkic groups could decide about the details of transition to the new alphabet.

**All-Union Central Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet**

In 1927 February Azerbaijan’s Central Committee Chair Samadaga Agamalyoglu created the All-Union Central Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet (VTsKNTA) and became its Chair. Of the thirty-nine members, four were from Turkmenistan: Kumuşaly Böriew, Muhammet Geldiew, Bekki E. Berdiew, and Başım Perengiýew.266 Not long afterward, the Turkmen TsIK Chair, Nedirbay Aitakov created the New Alphabet Committee in Turkmenistan. The Turkmen Cultural Institute (*Turkmenkul’i*) and the Turkmen Publishing People’s Commission were charged with the task of solving academic questions tied to the New Alphabet.267

Throughout Central Asia institutes were created to handle the script reform. In Turkmenistan, the Turkmen Central Committee for the New Turkic Alphabet (TsKNTA) was responsible for Latinization.268 The State Academic Council (GUS), within the Turkmen Commissariat of Education, oversaw language planning more generally, including lexical enrichment and development of a standardized literary language and orthography.269 From 1928-1932, the section for language and literature at the Institute of Turkmen Culture (*Turkmenkul’i*), with Böriew at its helm, assumed responsibility of language planning and

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266 Başım Külbeşherow was there as a representative from Moscow, Şahamuradow’s role is unclear.
268 It was responsible to Turkmenistan’s lead political and governmental body, the Central Executive Committee (TSSR TsIK).
development. As important Russian and Turkic groups such as Bolsheviks, Young Turks, Young Ottomans, and jadids had before Turkmenkul’t used newspapers to communicate with the general public. The Russian-language Turkmenovedenie (Turkmenology) and the Turkmen-language Türkmen medeniýeti (Turkmen culture) contained articles by Böriew, Geldiew, Garahanow, Gelenow and others.

At the January 1928 VTsIKNTA, Boriew explained the position of Turkmen intellectuals’ response to Latinization

We began [to Latinize] in May 1927 when we received the resolution from the higher directive organs…before that, there were some sympathizers among us, generally speaking though, now, in Turkmenistan there are no more strong Arabists and [we] are proper Latinists…we retain [the Arabic script] only while we transition to the Latin alphabet.

Böriew discussed the lack of resistance among Turkmen intellectuals, explaining at the 1928 meeting that Turkmen held no debates about converting. There are only records of articles pointing out the “advantages” of the Latin over the Arabic. Boriew did mention more than once that “incidents” had occurred, for example in Charjew, when they tried to convert village schools to the Latin alphabet. But he did not provide any detail, simply assuring the New Turkic Alphabet Committee that these events had been “contained.”

Party representatives, of course, were not concerned with supporting a Muslim identity. They recognized that the change in alphabet would have its greatest impact on the lives of the clergy, who “were afraid of losing their selfish, exploitive monopoly on literacy.” Chairman Aitakow assured

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270 This reorganized in 1932 to the Turkmen State Scientific-Research Institute. A. Potseluevskii, “Iazykovoe stroitel’stvo Turkmenii i ego osnovnye problemy,” Revoliutsiia i Natsional’nosti, 9, 1935, p. 44. The Turkmen Academic Commission was originally named the Türkmen Bilim Heýaty. Its task had been to create a reformed Arabic script, see chapter 2. Victoria Clement, "The Turkmen Academic Commission (Türkmen Bilim Heýaty) 1921-1923" Ohio Academy of History, April 1999.

271 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, p. 139. italics mine

272 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, pp. 140-141.
the VTsIK NTA that they did not expect clerics to seriously hamper party efforts, writing
“There is no great clerical influence in Turkmenia.”

Latinization in Turkmenistan began in summer 1927, just a few weeks after the 1927 conference. The Turkmen Academic Commission and formulated new spelling rules, which the newspaper *Türkmenistan* would provide lessons in beginning that December. Turkmen participated in the subsequent conferences, but they did not want the dialectical peculiarities of the Turkmen language [osobennost’ zvukov turkmenskogo iazyka] obscured by the common orthography of “unification”. At the 1927 VTsKTA, Kumuşaly Böriew, head of the Turkmen Cultural Institute, said he would not speak about what the Turkmen had accomplished at that point, because they had “accomplished nothing” regarding Latinization. He argued that the introduction of the Latin script should be handled at the local level. Organization of printing machinery, publishing, and the opening of courses for teachers should be concentrated in peripheries, while the center should continue to act as a guide and decide upon broad questions. However, because Turkmenistan was “behind” and had difficulties, for example, in publishing textbooks in the Turkmen language, it should rely on the experiences of others such as Azerbaijan. After his comments on the general situation, Böriew took the opportunity to underscore what he saw as the question greater than whether one or multiple alphabets might be used by Turks: that of which orthography should be elected. Reflecting the persistent concern over pronunciation of local idioms and spelling, Böriew was concerned primarily with finding an orthography that could “reflect” spoken

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273 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 8. This was especially true in comparison to Tatar communities, where the party’s resentment of clergy was intense. GARF f. 3316, o. 4, d. 151, ll. 9-31.
276 *Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma VTsK po provedeniui novogo tiurkskogo alfavita* (Moscow, 1927), p. 57.
277 *Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma*, 1927, p. 58.
The New Turkic Alphabet Committee did publish an alphabet chart to announce a unified script proposal, but the Turkmen representatives found it insufficient for representing spoken Turkmen. Böriew’s advocacy for “decentralization” of language issues was in line with central policy at the time.

Orthographic Unification?

Serious problems arose with unification due both to struggle among groups to grasp cultural power and to local representatives’ assertions of linguistic peculiarities. The Turkmen were particularly vocal about their need to preserve in writing the distinctiveness of their speech. Muhammed Geldiew fought relentlessly at the forefront of this issue. He was concerned about the same issues he had been during Turkmen reform of their Arabic alphabet: writing reflected the spoken language and language marked identity; literacy was good and a phonetic alphabet facilitated literacy. The long vowels were of particular concern but also frequently mentioned in conference proceedings was the Turkmen proclivity for pronouncing the graphemes “s” [s] and “z” [z] with a “th” [θ] sound. Overall, Turkmen did not resist Latinization, but neither were they willing to forgo their regional linguistic identity. They were able to accept the idea of script change, as long as it didn’t interfere with the development of the Turkmen language or the spread of literacy, or challenge the distinctiveness of Turkmen identity.

Capital letters

A second Turcological congress was planned in 1927 to discuss the questions of capital letters and print versus hand-written script; each bore influence on questions of unification. Among Soviet alphabet/language reformers, there were divergent views on the

278 Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 59.
topic of capital letters and on the principle of one shape or letter to represent one meaning. For example, Tiurkulov included capital letters in his project, but the Russia linguist E. D. Polivanov found them “excessive” and did not include them in his project. The authors of the Kyrgyz project determined that the introduction of capitals letters complicated reading and writing. Since Kyrgyz were focused on children and development of the alphabet in pedagogical works, they chose what they deemed to be the simplest path. However, the authors of the Turkmen project disagreed with the Kyrgyz and especially with Shonanov of Kazakstan, finding that “capital letters introduced the greatest technological advantage to facilitating reading and speediness in [a reader’s] comprehension of a text.”

The question of to what degree other Turks should follow the Azerbaijani lead was constant, especially in the effort to unify the alphabets. Azeris were not using the capital letters. The GUS of TSSR considered capital letters and punctuation to have played a big role in the Yakuts’ early experience with Latinization and saw the potential to build upon that. Turkmen saw an advantage to capital letters especially in math and science. While acknowledging that proposed representations of capital letters would result in shapes very close to that of lower case letters, the limits of typographical technology had to be taken into consideration. The Turkmen Academic Commission did not wish “to deprive the new Turkmen alphabet of the great technological advantage [capital letters could provide] in the relationship between reading and handling a text.” Thus, the Academic Commission explained that it would adopt capital letters as a means of expediting literacy. But the question of unification remained unsettled.

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279 Polozhenie, 1926, p. 29.
280 From the letter of GUS TSSR 13 July 1926, No. 4574, cited in Polozhenie, 1926, p. 25. GUS=Gosudarstvenoi Uchenoi Sovet (State Scientific Council)
281 27 February 1926, TsIK TSSR, GARF f. 3316, o. 19, d. 842, l. 33.
The Turkmen were not the only group to frustrate the unification process. The Azeri chairman, Agamalyoglu, exasperated at the length at which some academics theorized about unification, exploded at the 1928 meeting, “[professor] Polivanov keeps talking about unification, but he doesn’t realize that we are on a battlefront where we need to fire and fire not just aim...unification will be created from the will [volia] of life, not from the will of scholarly invention.”

Not limited to alphabet, unification included language development such as legal terminology—in the Turkic (and Tatar) languages. But already in 1928 the frustration with unification was apparent. Upon explaining how Turkmen had relied on the examples of other Turkic groups, who were more developed in their teaching reforms and language planning, Böriew expressed irritation with the larger experience. He mentions the question of unification specifically, underscoring that while Azerbaijan had become a regional leader in these areas, Azeri reluctance to adopt a unified alphabet was impeding the overall transition.

The question of unification is of interest to us...a lot of Azerbaijanis come to teach our students, but the Azeri culture is strong and our students end up with a jumbled mess. So we in Turkmenistan wish that Azerbaijan would transition to the unified alphabet soon or let none of us transition at all.

Several such conferences took place in the following years, suggesting that the central Soviet agreed with the Scientific Soviet which found that alphabets and writing should be deliberated “not once, not twice, [but in] periodic check-ups.” Without regular language maintenance, the members predicted they would end up with divergences between language pronunciations and writing systems. In order to avoid such divergences, they note, it is

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282 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, p. 117. Italics mine.
283 GARF f. 3316, o. 22, d. 62, ll. 3-5.
284 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, p. 141.
285 Polozhenie, 1926, pp. 6-7.
necessary periodically to ‘repair’ the writing system, or, as Shcherba had said, ‘sharpen’ it (like a pencil).

Muhammed Geldiew also attended the 1927 conference even though he was not a member of the official committee. He took special umbrage to comments made by the Crimean Tatar Chobanzade and the Uzbek Tynystanov. “We could follow Chobanzade’s suggestion to organize a commission to create a scientific transcription system, but would one system be sufficient? Would one morphological system?” he asked, grilling them rhetorically.\(^\text{286}\) He then challenged Chobanzade to further clarify his position on vowel harmony (singarmonizm). The question, Geldiew asserted, was not on which basis unification of the “languages” would be most convenient, but whether the alphabet project should be based on the phonetic principle, a morphological principle, or both together. “Turkmen and Kyrgyz, unlike Kazak, have properly preserved the rules of vowel harmony, how do we preserve this principle in a unified system?” At the suggestions made by Chobanzade and Tynystanov that Turkmen might not have preserved the characteristics unique to Turkic languages, Geldiew responded with a vigorous sneer, “Never say that Turkmen has not preserved vowel harmony.”\(^\text{287}\) He accused Chobanzade of spouting “nonsense” about orthography, then asserted his own opinion that the most pressing issue was in fact vowels. He specifically focuses on the fact that Turkmen possesses sixteen vowels. Agazade objected, “Twelve.” “No,” answered back Geldiew, “not twelve. I maintain that there are sixteen. If we are to go ahead with unification according to Çobanzade’s plan then Turkmen needs sixteen vowels. Without these additions, there can be no unification. Moreover, we must adhere to the phonetic principle. Morphology will not

\(^{286}\) Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 146.

\(^{287}\) Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 127.
do. I repeat, no one can argue with the details of our alphabet, or the vowels appearing in it.”

Although Geldiew was blunt in his statements, he was not politically off course. In that same year, discussions of teaching methodologies in Narkomnats reaffirmed that local languages were the primary media for teaching the Russian language. “Every national school was obliged to base its teaching methodologies and textbooks on the specific internal ‘peculiarities’ of the national languages.”

The Russian linguist Polivanov, who had been involved in language planning from the beginning, used the Turkmen case to demonstrate that the idea of “unification” could not mean that every alphabet will be identical. Some systems, he explained, would need to have special symbols to represent dialectical variation. Agazade sought compromise for all, suggesting that they choose nine common vowels and make room for five more special vowels. It would seem that Geldiew had made intellectual headway. Still, he was not making friends. Agazade took a moment to share that the Turkmen had been arguing with the Kazak representative, Shonanov, about this question of extra letters for some time. He expounded on linguistic detail, noting that while there are varying numbers of vowels, “there have never been sixteen.” Before wrapping up, Agazade took the opportunity to deride the Turkmen GUS and remind the audience that it had submitted a cumbersome proposal that included diacritics—a major faux pas during the time when unification sought to simplify alphabets.

On the eve of the 10th anniversary of the 1917 revolution, the TSSR’s TsIK’s second session decreed that in the Republic the Latin-based New Turkmen Alphabet would replace the old script. The TSSR TsIK and People’s Soviet Commissars on 3 January 1928, in

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288 Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 128.
290 Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 144.
291 Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 147.
292 Stenograficheskii otchet pervogo plenuma, 1927, p. 149.
resolution 268, decreed it as the state alphabet. 293 A few months later, the Turkmen committee for the new alphabet passed resolutions verifying the plan to transition to the Latin alphabet. The new alphabet was to be established by 1 January 1930.294

*Narkompros*, along with *Turkmenkul’t* and *Gosizdat*, was responsible for managing a five-year publishing plan to Latinize textbooks, study aids, and literature.295 *Sovnarkom* instructed *Narkompros* in the 1928-29 school year not to send any textbooks written in the Arabic alphabet. In addition to the script change in such newspapers and journals as *Türkmenistan* and *Tokmak*, the Turkmen NTA Committee assigned *Gosizdat* the task of publishing a new Turkmen language journal, *Kyzyl ýol* (*Red path*), specifically to run articles about the question of writing, the duty of teachers with respect to the new script, and regional happenings regarding literacy and learning.296 Azerbaijan was the first to publish such an organ—*Yeni Yol*—but the center insisted that each region publish such newspapers and journals—in the local language—to support Latinization as well as *korenizatsiia*.297 Official paperwork likewise was to be conducted in the new script by 1 October 1929 exclusively in Turkmen “keeping in line with the *korenizatsiia* of the state apparatus (*gosapparat*).” All state administration offices were required to prepare their employees and all publications were to be written solely in the NTA by 1 January 1929.298 As Chairman of the TSSR, N. Aýtakow was in charge of transition to the new script in Turkmenistan, but Kumuşaly

293 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 6-8.
294 *Narkompros* had special responsibilities to ensure the thoroughness of the transition by establishing summer courses to prepare village teachers and to oversee the transition among first and second grades, in village and city schools, by 1 September 1928 but for third and fourth grades by 1 January 1929. ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 26. *Zasedania komiteta po provedeniiu novogo-turkmenskogo alfavitn* ot 11 mart 1928 g.
295 The central government sent monies to support these activities. See GARF f. 3316, o. 10, d. 22,l. 17. Literature was to change over by 1 October 1928, although newspapers had until 1 October 1929 to change scripts. GARF 3316, o. 22, d. 10, ll. 40-40ob. *Postanovlenntia TsIK and SNK SSSR 7 August 1929.*
296 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 155-155ob.
297 GARF f. 3316, o. 42, d. 164, ll. 89-90. Resolution of the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR, 20 January 1928. On Ossetian language, Uzbek, and those of RSFSR see ll. 91-103 (1927); on Moldovan ASSR see l. 80 (24 April 1928). All are resolution of Sovnats TsIK SSSR.
298 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 26.
Böriew was responsible for the daily management and the Turkmenification of textbooks, literature, and schools. Aýtakov assigned Geldiew the preparation of school syllabi and courses. Their positions in Turkmenkul’t also required Böriew and Geldiew to prepare a textbook in Turkmen and Russian explaining the new alphabet. Finally, the two, along with Artykow and Garpow (chair) comprised a commission responsible for presenting material on the NTA to the TSSR TsIK.

In 1927-28 Turkmen newspapers and journals began printing sections with the new Latin letters. Then other material in the new alphabet began appearing. The People’s Education Commissariat started classes designed specifically to instruct teachers and other professionals in the new alphabet. To bring this to fruition on only a local budget would have been very difficult. Moscow assisted in the form of general financial support as well as courses to help republican representatives prepare themselves as instructors of the new Latin alphabet. By 1928 Narkompros was organizing courses for the “re-education” of teachers. The state expected all village teachers to learn the new alphabet well enough to teach in it in the likbez schools, kindergartens, and first grade classes beginning in the 1928/29 academic year.

Although the alphabet change meant a shift in resources and the need for new books in the short-term, long-term goals were still literacy and creating an alphabet that would support learning. The Turkmen Cultural Commission (Turkmenkul’t), which was responsible for cultural development, rather than dwelling on the loss of the Arabic script and the heritage symbolized by it, focused on the social advances they thought Turkmen would

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299 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 26ob.
300 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 40, l. 65-66.
301 GARF f. 5451, o. 13, d. 509, ll. 12-22, 52-53 Money from the center for Kul’totdel’s efforts at Liquidation of Illiteracy with VTsKNTA
gain. “The liquidation of illiteracy was one of the most basic cultural issues of the first five year plan.”

**Geldiew as Partner**

In 1928, Muhammed Geldiew stopped work on the reformed Arabic script and shifted his attention full-time to creating orthography and grammar rules for a Latin-based alphabet. Geldiew worked within party parameters, but he did not abandon his principles in depicting Turkmen language peculiarities or teaching with the phonetic method. In addition to creating a Turkmen term for “phonetics” [*ses bilimi* or study of sound], the final introductory point in his 1929 *Grammar* explained that a spoken language and the written language were distinctly different entities. However, if the written word did not grow and evolve along with the spoken language, which changes with each experience of its speakers, the written language would reflect a dead language. The authors then made phonetics the first chapter of their textbook, with long vowel representation the initial subject matter. Geldiew had not forsaken the issue of long vowels and insisted that the Turkmen alphabet accommodate their expression. As early as 1928 they had worked out a system for expressing long vowels by writing double vowels in words. In the years of *korenizatsiia* accommodating such local particulars was not uncommon. The VTsIK NTA accepted the Turkmen solution for expressing their spoken dialect. Kamchin-bek even used it as an example to illustrate why there would not be 100% correlation between alphabets, despite efforts to unify, because every national alphabet had to reflect peculiarities. “For example, in Turkmenistan, when the

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303 Fierman, 1991, p. 98; GARF, f. 3316, o. 28, d. 769, l. 198 ob.
304 Geldiew and Alparow, 1929, pp. 16-17.
305 Ibid, pp. 18-50.
letter “a” is softened [sic] it is written twice. In that way, they use the letter “a” more than the other republics. Every republic will work on this question independently.”

Even at general meetings, issues of dialectical peculiarity and identity persisted. At the 1928 VTsK NTA plenum Turkmen, Uzbek and Kazak representatives requested a discussion of capital letters. They proposed that every republic have the “right” to adopt or not adopt capital letters. An argument ensued with unidentified voices from the audience quibbling over procedure until the chairman shouted at them. He went on to clarify that the question should remain open and in the hands of the Scientific Council—rather than decided by them. Geldiew responded, “Fine, many questions remain open, but there is no question about the “right” (pravo)…” Geldiew seems to have been arguing that most issues should be decided in local committees. Geldiew’s name does not appear anywhere else in the stenographic record, so it is not obvious how large a role he played at this conference. What is obvious is that he has made himself known to the other members and some do not like his ideas—or perhaps him. A voice from the audience objected specifically to Geldiew’s suggestion.

It was not only Turkmen that needed special attention, such Caucasian languages as Ossetian, Cherkess, and Ingush used a letter “ё” to signify the sound [sh]. Umar Aliev and others responsible for establishing the Unified Latin Alphabet in the Northern Caucasus felt that this was just the sort of particular that called for a “scientific” conference. Geldiew also pursued terminology development, reinvigorating old terms found in poetry and literature to help create a socialist lexicon that could reflect the Turkic-ness of the language.

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306 GARF f. 1235, o. 123, d. 19, l. 27. Zasedaniia VTsIK NTA, 22-24 July 1928.
307 1928, p. 217.
309 Perhaps the first unnamed voice from the audience is Geldiew’s.
310 GARF f. 1235, o. 123, d. 19, ll. 32-57.
This was very much in harmony with Soviet strategies of language development. Although Latinization had eliminated opportunity for their reformed Arabic script, Turkmen still intended to develop the Turkmen language, defeat illiteracy, spread enlightenment, and modernize what was, after the 1924 delimitation of Central Asia, a “nation.”

**Terminology**

The Turkmen Cultural Commission spent several years working on developing the Turkmen language and preparing a dictionary. Kümüşaly Böriew, head of *Turkmenkul’t*, Muhammed Geldiew, A. N. Samoilovich and Potseluevskii were the most heavily involved. In 1927 they began collecting vocabulary from books (contemporary and ancient). Then in order to access the language of the workers, they undertook expeditions throughout Turkmenistan. The largest, in 1928, involved twenty-two male and two female researchers. The men collected vocabulary from the Yomut, Ahal-Teke, Göklen tribes, three of the largest, while the women collected proverbs, sayings, and songs. Work on the dictionary began in the second half of 1928. Böriew, who was at the time the Director of *Turkmenkul’t* was involved directly, creating nearly 5,000 examples of terms and usage. He turned his work over to Samoilovich who collected words from the Turkmen-Russian Dictionary and Begjanow and Yakuwyw who collected works from fishermen and tribes on the west coast. After their 1929 publications the Commission expanded its terminology collecting to include all regions. They focused first on the Kalapyn and Ersary in the Amu-Darya region, and then

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311 Edgar, 2005.
Mary-Teke, Saryk, and Sary tribes. Finally, they went to the smallest tribes: Igdir, Chowdur, Ali-eli, Änawli, and Nohur.314

In June 1929, the Central Executive Committee SSR was still calling for publication of laws in the “unified (Latin) Turkic alphabet.”315 The Turkmen Executive Committee continued to define education along ideological lines, calling for the “sovietization of schools” and chiding village schools for unsatisfactorily supplying “international and antireligious vospitanie.”316 Individual language reformers, however, were more concerned with daily successes. Böriew announced that Turkmenistan wished that our all-union committee would be concerned with securing typewriters for our republic. We have not a single typewriter but we soon will want our institutions to write outgoing papers in the Latin alphabet.317

The end of unification

Several representatives noted at the 1928 meeting that “anarchy” reigned in the question of unification.318 Polivanov agreed, explaining that the dilemma with unification was that it had been proposed on the basis of vowel harmony. The problem lay with languages, such as Uzbek, which did not use vowel harmony.319 Sheila Fitzpatrick has written about the degree of force the Soviet state exerted both during the Civil War and during NEP, into the 1920s. But under Stalin, especially during the first-five year plan, collectivization, industrialization, urbanization and the emphasis on speed were reflected in

315 GARF f. 3316, d. 22, o. 62, ll. 3-5.
316 Postanovleniia 3-go Vseturkmenskogo s’ezda sovetov, 1929, pp. 25-27.
317 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, p. 55. See complaints about the delay in the use of type in state organs"Vypusk Alfavita nado uskorit’," Turkmenskaia Iskra, 19 January 1928, No. 16 (943), p. 3.
318 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, p. 45.
319 Stenograficheskii otchet vtorogo plenuma, 1929, p. 47.
the drive for literacy. The 1928 VsKNTA Committee, which met in Kazan, reflected the intensity and frenetic pace of socialization. William Fierman identifies the December 1928 meeting as a preparatory step for intensification of language planning. At that meeting, the VTsKNTA members debated speediness versus realistic goals. Korkmasov suggested the slogan “Speed! On Time!” encouraging members to reach set targets. Alimjan argued for an increased tempo, suggesting the completion of latinization by 1 January 1930.320 Others argued that targets had been set too high and should be modified. Efendiev, from Armenia, suggested a sluggishness among Central Asian representatives, asking coarsely whether these were people living in these territories or camels?!321 The perceived need for speed won out.

The 1928 plenum resolved to “accelerate” adoption of the new alphabet and the resolution specific to Turkmenistan declared that Turkmen should quicken the pace of their translation of paperwork to the Latin alphabet taking care of the need for typewriters, hasten the tempo of printing in the new alphabet and create conditions so that they could have the new Turkmen writing system in place within two years.322 The following year, 1929, the Turkmen Central Executive Committee demanded a more rapid tempo in education work.323

Turkmenistan’s First Scientific Conference

19-23 May 1930 Turkmenkul’t organized Turkmenistan’s First Scientific Conference for standardization of the literary language, terminology, and grammar.324 In his report to the Turkmen Publishing Commissariat, Böriew acknowledged Samoilovich, Chobanzade,
Alparow, and Geldiew as having been instrumental in Turkmen linguistic work and the conference.\textsuperscript{325} Linguists from around the Turkic world and Russia attended.\textsuperscript{326} The purpose of the conference was to establish norms for the Turkmen literary language and to save the language from “anarchy.” The main points included: the language of the press (especially the newspaper \textit{Türkmenistan}) would be the basis for the literary language; the presses would standardize all words and grammar (there was to be no vacillation between tribal dialects); vowel-consonant harmony would be observed; the full forms of words would be employed, not vernacular short forms (“do not take” \textit{alamok} should be written \textit{alanym yok}); foreign verbs would be accompanied by Turkmen helping verbs (\textit{habar etmek mälim etmek}) or could be made into Turkmen verbs (\textit{mälimlemek, habarlamak}); it was the responsibility of \textit{Turkmenkul’t} and the State Publishing house to oversee these usages in the \textit{Türkmen edebi dil} (Turkmen literary language).\textsuperscript{327}

\textit{Turkmenkul’t} continued to adhere to the phonetic principle. This was perhaps the most salient point at the conference as it determined that Turkmen words would be spelled as they sounded. However, the work done in preparation for the conference, especially the expeditions, had determined which pronunciations would be followed. Böriew, Geldiew and the other members amassed words and speech patterns from all Turkmen regions in order to derive a standardized language that was understood to the greatest number of people. They firmly desired a written language that represented the sounds of spoken Turkmen. The remaining question was then how to represent foreign words.

\textsuperscript{325} \textit{Türkmenistan 1-inji konferentsiyasyny}, 1930, pp. 3-6.
\textsuperscript{326} According to Edgar, 2005, p. 147, the Turkmen conference was scheduled to so that the participants could then move along to the fourth plenary meeting of the All-Union New Alphabet Committee in Almaty on 5 May 1930.
\textsuperscript{327} \textit{Türkmenistan 1-inji konferentsiyasyny}, 1930 pp. 8-10.
The Conference resolved that in order to develop the Turkmen language, they would borrow words from all other languages, including other Turkic languages, Russian, Persian, Arabic, or European. They would not pursue language purity through eradication of foreign terms, which is always a choice when developing a language.\textsuperscript{328} Instead, to make the written language intelligible to the greatest number of people, the conference offered four basic rules for spelling borrowed words: 1. if a foreign word could be spelled with Turkmen sounds (phonemes as represented by the graphemes in the latest alphabet) it should follow Turkmen phonology; 2. foreign words should be Turkmenified (suffixes, plurals, etc. would come from Turkmen);\textsuperscript{329} 3. in a word with long vowels, only one would be written;\textsuperscript{330} 4. foreign words that were brought into Turkmen to express wholly new concepts could be written according to Russian grammar (marksist, marksizm, komunist, komunizm).\textsuperscript{331}

Other major issues included the standardization of the written language. That is, the conference decision spelled out that publications should adhere to the rules established by the orthography-terminology committee of Turkmenkul’t. Moreover, in order to simplify and clarify language, words with multiple meanings would shed manifold connotations to become a representative of one, clear, precise meaning. Other words would have to be found or created in order to express the other meanings. The dictionary would be the acknowledged authority in this. Censorship was likely an important tool in this endeavor. If authorities disapproved of a term, they could remove it—like a surgeon removes an ulcer.

\textsuperscript{328} K. Böriew, “Türkmenistanyň birinji ylmy konferentsiýasy,” Türkmenistan, April 6, 1930, p. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{329} This often resulted in multiple plural markers such as in the word…. It also resulted in immediate objections, Medzhnun, “Turkmenskaia nauchnaia konferentsiia po voprosam literaturnogo iazyka, terminologii i orfografii,” Turkmenovedenie, No. 6-7, 1930, p. 7; Medzhnun, Puti razvitia turkmenskogo iazyka, Turkmenskaia iskra, 16 May 1930, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{330} Previously, in the Latin script, Turkmen had represented long vowels with two graphemes: aat, latyyn. Kult’ura i pis’menost’ Vostoka, volume 1, (Moscow, 1928), pp. 113-136.
\textsuperscript{331} Türkmenistan 1-inji konferentsiýasynyň, 1930, p. 13.
An important point of the conference that would reappear in later discussions about the validity of this work was the idea that Turkmen would retain commonly used words deriving from Arabic and Persian. Not only would the language be enriched with borrowings from Russian and European languages, but long-standing Arabic and Persian influences would also be retained (ynkylab (revolution), ylmy (scientific), edebi (literary)).

Finally, the conference determined that the Turkmen alphabet would employ nine vowel graphemes: a, o, ө, u, ə, e, ь, i. This reversed an earlier suggestion to mark all long vowels either with double letters or with a “ə” in front of the vowel in question.

As the name of the alphabet committee reflected, Turkic languages were the targets for Latinization. However, the program soon expanded to include Chechens, Kurds, and other non-Turkic, but Muslim peoples. This shift represents the Islamification of the Latin alphabet in the sense that the targeted groups were identified through their religion. They would not have been targets for alphabet change if they had not been Muslim. After the non-Turkic peoples joined in the Latinization movement, the name had to be changed from “New Turkic Alphabet” to “New Alphabet.” VTsKNTA became VTsKNA (Turkic was removed) and moved its headquarters from Baku to Moscow in 1930. In that same year Professors Çobanzade and Polivanov were removed from the Scientific Council as the central powers consolidated their control over the institutions of language. When the New Alphabet Committee met again in 1930 a total of thirty-six nationalities, including non-Turkic groups like Mongols, had adopted the new script. The 16 May 1930 issue of

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333 Türkmenistan 1-inji konferentsiyasyynyň, 1930, p. 16. See also
334 In 1929, G. Musabekov, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee SSSR, edited by hand “On the new latinization of the Turco-tatar alphabet” to read “On the new latinization of the alphabet of the peoples of the Arabic script SSSR.” GARF f. 3316, d. 22, o. 10, ll. 17-17ob.
335 Vsesoiuznyi, 1931, p. 251.
Turkmenistan printed a front-page announcement, “Pave the Way for the New Alphabet!” [Täze elipbiýi jol berin!]. With the Latin script in place the next step would be development of the literary languages: standardization, codification of grammars and dictionaries, and expansion of the lexicon to support industrialization and socialization.337

Ideological Shift

There was no one specific moment of change or one instant that contained a shift from the experimentation of korenizatsiia and the relative freedom felt in the Soviet republics to the centralization that limited local authority. There were however several sign posts in the early 1930s that each contributed to a general tightening of Party control and a reduction in the power of regional elites. With respect to language, transformation was symbolized in the dramatic shift toward a Latin-based script.338 A more material change was the move of the VTsKNTA from Baku to Moscow in 1930. Then, in 1932, a Politburo decree altered the Soviet nationalities policy triggering a “reversal of korenizatsiia.”339 Revisions in nationalities policy intensified, as did the accompanying terror. Denunciations first of smenovekhovtsy (see chapter 2) and then of national communists transformed the purges from class warfare against specialists to an ethnic-based fear of non-Russian elites.340 For example in 1933, the Party denounced Mykola Srypnyk, a Ukrainian nationalities specialist, and a staunch national communist, of “defection to nationalism” and overeagerness in

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338 Smith, 1999, p. 139.


Ukrainization.\textsuperscript{341} Within academic fields the rise of Marrist linguistics forced scholars in a wide variety of disciplines to conform their scholarship to the ideological authority of Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr (1864-1934), a prominent comparative linguist.\textsuperscript{342} During the cultural revolution, Marr’s “Japhetic Theory” emerged to offer a philological explanation for ethnogenesis. By 1934, as Marr’s ideas gained primacy in the connection between intellectual ideas and socialist construction, individual scholars fell into clear categories of pro- or anti-Marrist.\textsuperscript{343} Debate lasted until 1950, when Stalin himself weighed in on the subjects of linguistics, ethnogensis, and class in an article in \textit{Pravda}.

In the intervening years, academic purges were based on the linguistic theory of Marxist-Leninist dogma: fierce debates among scholars and scientists pitted student against teacher and led to calls for “military measures…to purge bourgeois elements from academia.”\textsuperscript{345} The general trend toward centralization of power, the end of \textit{korenizatsiya}, and the rise of Marrism contributed to the changes in language policy throughout the USSR.\textsuperscript{346}

In the early 1930s Latinization slowed but did not reverse. Language content took center stage while broader ideologies were worked out. There was a growing dissatisfaction over the translation and implementation of socialist terms from Russian. Moscow was no longer content with non-Russians finding equivalents in their own languages. Local dialects were no longer acceptable carriers for Marxist-Leninst terminology. The powerful Armenian

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\textsuperscript{341} Martin, 2001, pp. 344-393.
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\textsuperscript{343} Smith, 1999, pp. 80-120.
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\textsuperscript{344} \textit{Pravda}, 20 June 1950; Slezkine, 1996, p. 858.
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\textsuperscript{345} Smith, 1999, p. 97.
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Party official, Semen Diamanshtein, vociferously attacked the tenets of *korenizatsiia* and the over-reliance on dialects when the Russian language was available to every ethnic group.347

The first five-year plan (1928-1932) certainly affected the atmosphere in which language politics were taking place.348 While the precise dates did not shape language activity to the degree it did economic activity, an influence can be traced. Gail Lapidus writes “the Cultural Revolution coincided with a dramatic shift in educational policy.”349 The purges reached even into the secondary schools. In May 1928, the Komsomol announced a *kul’tpokhod* or “cultural campaign” against “literacy [as well as] against the educational bureaucracy that had so far failed to cope with the problem.”350

One feature on the language front that shifted as the NEP ended and the Cultural Revolution began was the transition in emphasis from adult literacy to the education of children. There was also a shift in tenor from “courses” to “campaigns” [*kul’tpokhod*].351 The *kul’tpokhod* was manned by *kul’tarmeitsy* (cultural soldiers) who organized into *kul’tbrigady* (cultural brigades).352 “The largest campaign for literacy (and latinization) came in the fall and winter of 1929, thus coinciding with some of the great chaos of forced collectivization.”353 By the late 1930s classrooms for the young were the main media for transmitting script change.354

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352 Eklof, 1987, p. 139. In this same volume see comparable brigades and military-like literacy campaigns in Cuba and Nicaragua.
The first five-year plan set figures for literacy. The state demanded that workers take responsibility for their role in the “revolution”. In 1927, the Party called for factory workers to be literate in one year’s time, and all collective and state farmers within two years. Following the Sixteenth Party Congress’s call for both full adult literacy and universal primary schooling, the Central Committee made four-year schooling compulsory for all children effective in the fall of 1931.\(^{355}\) Compulsion turned into coercion in the early 1930s with the beginnings of purges.

**Purges**

Stalin had long planned the substitution of the old intelligentsia with a new generation of Moscow-loyal ‘cadres and specialists’ who had been trained in Moscow by the Party.\(^{356}\) When the training of the new elite was complete, it would be time for the old intelligentsia to move (or be moved) aside. Even the deceased would have to be silenced. Their reputations were besmirched and their works labeled anti-Soviet. The simultaneous need for class war and to preserve the essential cadre of experts, led to both ideological and practical conflict. An institutional purge ensued when Stalin implied his support in an ambiguous *Pravda* editorial.

Authors of cultural reforms of the 1920s were accused of being nationalists whose chauvinistic goals threatened to wreck socialism. Arrests were widespread. In non-Russian regions, there was a specific link between work done on national culture in the 1920s and purges of the 1930s. In early 1930s, Geldiew, and other well-known intellectuals were

\(^{355}\) Eklof, 1987, p. 139. See Armove and Graff, 1987, for other case studies.

branded “bourgeois nationalists” for the work they accomplished just a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{357}

The Turkmen linguist Sopiew denounced Geldiew, Böriew, Garahanow, and Wepaew as class enemies who had tried to retain the influences of the old-Turkic language Chagatay. Attacks used Geldiew’s attempt to bring written Turkmen closer to the other written Turkic languages through alignment of these letters, such as “g” and “k”.\textsuperscript{358}

The issue of terminology had never really been settled and in the posthumous attacks on Geldiew, it was raised again. Geldiew’s desire to rely on existing Turkic vocabulary, found in other dialects or ancient literature, made him a target for those seeking to discredit ‘nationalists’ which by the period of Latinization was a dirty word. Staunch Soviets objected to Geldiew’s approach, calling those who used Arabic and Persian words in creating terminology ‘pan-Islamists.’ They considered those who translated Soviet-international words like ‘proletariat as ýoksul, or imperialism as ýurtbasar,’ as opposed to the Russian proletariat and imperialism, to be nationalists.\textsuperscript{359} Denounciations built upon the work of Garahanow and continued to represent Geldiew’s works as those of an anti-Soviet, national chauvinist, who was trying to separate Turkmen from Russian and the socialist path. Work on the unified Turkic literary language came under special attack.

The language Geldiew used in his 1929 articles continues his own pan-Turkist and nationalistic path. He was trying to build a literary language, which was shallow, that is, without taking from other languages and without becoming closer to Russian.\textsuperscript{360}

This despite the fact that by 1929 Geldiew had very much come to support the idea of borrowing words from Russian. At the Third All-Turkmen Congress of Soviets he said


\textsuperscript{358} Q. Sopiew, Elipbi we imla (orfografiia) meselesi, Kommunistler magaryf, May-June 1934, No. 5-6, pp. 23-29.

\textsuperscript{359} G. Gurtmyradow, “Türkmen dilinde terminologiya işlemekeşini yiti meseleri doğrusunda birnäçe söz,” Şuralar Türkmenistany, 30 January 1930, p. 3; Gurtmyradow, “Dil we adagalarda arapçylyga we milletçilige garşy,” Şuralar Türkmenistany, 5 April 1935, p. 2.

“We feel that our poor language should fill itself with international words primarily from Russian on account of the closeness of Russian culture.”

Abdulhekim Gulmuhammedow, editor of Türkmenistan, assistant editor of Tokmak and Daýhan and delegate to the 1925 First All-Turkmen Congress, took his own life; Berdi Kerbabaew, the author and poet was imprisoned; in 1932 Kümüşaly Böriew, Director of the Turkmen Cultural Institute and the Turkmen State Publishing House, as well as Commissar of Education was jailed. Allaguly Garahanow, who had been a member of the Turkmen Academic Commission for about sixth months in 1924, had publicly disagreed with Geldiew’s 1923 alphabet proposal. In 1932, Garahanow attacked Geldiew and the other members of the Turkmen Academic Commission for their methods of language reform. Later, in 1937-38 Stalin’s great purges took more Turkmen elite. Gaýgasyz Atabaew, Nedirbaý Aýtakow, Gurban Sähadew, Allaguly Garahanow, who had ironically attacked others, were stigmatized as “enemies of the people” (halk düşmanı) and “eliminated.”

Centralization of Turkmen language policy

The decapitation of the Turkmen intelligentsia in the purges brought language planning to a temporary halt. After the removal of the alphabet committee members, even language planners from the center could not resuscitate the effort right away. A year later the TSSR Central Executive Committee reorganized a Turkmen alphabet committee with the intent of standardizing Turkmen orthography and the use of foreign terminology.

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363 Täçmyradow, 1989, p. 31; Allaguly Garahanow, “Nazariya meýdanyna bol’šewiklikerkli bilen göрешли,” Medeni Ynkylap, 1932, Nos. 4-5.
364 Söýegow, 1993, p. 54.
365 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 1015, ll. 24-28.
members planned to create terminological dictionaries for specific subjects (math, physics, anatomy, military science, language and literature, biology and political economy). 366 In 1935 the central alphabet committee sent M. I. Bogdanova to Turkmenistan to evaluate the state of language work. She stayed on becoming the lead official in Turkmen language planning as head of a new research institute on language and literature within the Turkmen State Scientific Research Institute (TGNII), the successor to Turkmenkul’i. 367 Bogdanova worked with the linguist Potseluevskii to bring in specialists from Moscow and Leningrad, marginalizing the Turkmen members of her committee and Europeanizing language planning in Turkmenistan. The mid- to late-1930s witnessed a mounting level of central party control over the details of language construction in the peripheries. The transformation in Turkmen language planning was equally symbolic and material. Earlier policies were being reversed and the names of the men who initiated them were dragged through the mud. Bogdanova, a corporeal representation of the Soviet state, embodied double symbolism firstly in her person and secondly in her last name, which in Russian means “God given.” This transformation from Turkmen to Russian came to appear in language content and alphabet.

**Conclusion**

The Latinization campaign was quintessentially Soviet in that it was a cultural means to attaining a larger and specific political end: sovietization (*sovetskoe stroitelstvo*). Each proposal for writing reform reflected a desire to use culture to stimulate social or political change and each operated variously as a point of intellectual debate (Arabic script was backward, Latin was modern), a symbol of identity (national, Soviet, or Muslim), and a

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practical means of facilitating literacy (functional and political). From (1926-1939) the roles
of intellectuals, linguistics, local identity, and Islam shifted several times. The Soviet era
began with attempts at political and intellectual compromise and aspirations to engender
general enlightenment in Turkic communities; the legacies of jadidism did not die out, but
then blended into and faded into campaigns to build a Soviet society. This era ended with
many intellectuals marginalized (or dead), the Soviet identity taking precedence over the
local or national identities, Islam severely restricted, and alphabets marred (so to speak) by
the peculiarities of the Stalin era. First, the arrest of Turkmen elites and the denunciation of
their work and then the 1936 First Turkmen Language Conference paralleled political and
cultural shifts that were taking place throughout the Soviet Union. By bringing language
planners from Moscow and Leningrad to take over the work of Turkmen linguists, the center
demonstrated that it was ending korenizatsiia. The adoption of the Cyrillic script in place of
the Latin starkly symbolized the shift of cultural power from the peripheries to the center and
the Russification of Soviet Turkmenistan. Türkmençilik did not disappear, but in these years
the forms and expressions of identity altered.
CHAPTER 4

Sovietization via Cyrillicization, 1936-1990

"Literacy will facilitate the brotherhood of the many Soviet peoples."\textsuperscript{368}

"The question of Latinization was never limited only to that of alphabet."\textsuperscript{369}

Ernest Gellner has argued that in an industrial society the state must assume responsibility for the “national educational and communications systems” in order to ensure that the citizenry is educated to fulfill the state’s economic needs.\textsuperscript{370} A standardized language and alphabet are practical needs in a modern state. In many respects, it made sense for the Soviet government to expect all its citizens to employ at least one common language and alphabet.

The period from the late 1930s to the 1980s witnessed a general policy of Russification in the Soviet Union and increase in the power of the Russian language, which decreased some powers of national languages and cultures. The history of alphabet reform illustrates a shift that took place in the relationship between center and periphery as Russification of language reflected a tighter centralization of power more generally throughout the USSR. In 1936 First all-Turkmen Language Congress marked the central government’s assumption of control over Turkmen language policy. By 1940, the Latin script had given way to Cyrillic and in many regions, including Turkmenistan, terms were overshadowed by Soviet-international terms—borrowed from or via Russian. In 1954 the

\textsuperscript{368} E. Jumayýew, “Türkmeniň edebi dilini kontrevolutsion milletçileriň t:asirinden arassalamaly,” Sowet Türkmenistany, 5 October 1937, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{369} ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 1015, l. 27. Iusupowa, member of VTsKNA, to TSSR’s Kul’tprop TsK.

Turkmen Communist Party leadership codified these linguistic changes at the Second All-
Turkmen Linguistic Conference.

Traditional western scholarship supposed that Cyrillicization was part of a deliberate
Soviet effort to fragment language groups such as Turks in order to weaken cultural
affinity.\textsuperscript{371} The details of this chapter illustrate the tumult of the many levels of bureaucracy
and the number of institutions involved in Cyrillicization, as well as the varied contributions
of individual citizens. Examination of these alphabet, language, and education policy in
Turkmenistan reveals the regard held for the power of language symbolism even during the
years of industrialization, World War II, and the death of Stalin. These years also confirm
the important role of the general populace in education and language policy. Teachers
played an increasingly prominent role in the Turkmen sources substantiating the enduring
connection between education, culture, and political policy.

\textit{The First all-Turkmen Language Congress: 1936}

Turkmenistan’s party created the Turkmen State Scientific Research Institute as a
successor to \textit{Turkmenkul’t} in 1936.\textsuperscript{372} M. I. Bogdonova, A. P. Potseluevskii, and the new
language leadership organized the First all-Turkmen Language Congress 18-24 May 1936.
The conference participants aimed to “right” what they perceived as the “wrongs” of the
1930 conference. They attacked Böriew, Geldiew, and Garahanow by name. Potseluevskii
called them “counterrevolutionary nationalists.”\textsuperscript{373} Döwlet Mamedow charged Böriew and

\textsuperscript{371} Paul B. Henze describes Cyrillicization as “devised [by Moscow]…deliberately made as different from each
other as possible,” in “Politics and Alphabets in Inner Asia,” in Fishman, ed. 1977, p. 382, 402; Herman
1997).
\textsuperscript{372} Edgar, 2004, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{373} ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 55.
Geldiew with having favored the Yomut tribal dialect in early reforms. Garahanow elicited “special attention” due his attempts to bring to the Turkmen literary language “a grammar characteristic of the Turkish caliphate.”

Bogdanova’s own presentation did not mention anyone by name, but leveled her accusations more generally at “panturkists” of having oriented the Turkmen literary language to “the dead language Chagatay and even the ancient Uyghur language.” Instead, Turkmen would follow the “universal mold” in spelling (кыргыз → коммунист, мелиса → милиция) and would employ readily available international-soviet terms in place of “arabo-iranian elements” (юксарилар → proletariat, бирлеше → союз).

A memo from the Soviet of Nationalities (Sovnats) on 17 February 1937 assured the Central Executive Committee of the USSR that the 1936 conference had “stabilized” the Turkmen alphabet. Musabekov, chair of the VTsKNA, wrote in early 1937, based on a presentation by Bogdanova, that the First all-Turkmen Linguistic Conference had cleared up the “muddle” in Turkmen orthography and terminology.

In fact, the main difference between this and the 1930 conference was the privileging of international forms of words that had no equivalent in Turkmen. It did continue to favor the phonetic method, adhering to the rules of Turkmen if a world could be coherently translated into Turkmen (оборона → горана [defense], бор’ба → гөрөш [war]). Otherwise, international concepts absent from the existing Turkmen lexicon would be written in their original forms (идеолог, империализм) or in Russian (кризис [crisis], актив [active]), if

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374 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 48-54; Edgar, 2004, p. 161.
375 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 77.
376 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 74-88.
377 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 121.
378 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, ll. 45-48, 109-109ob.
380 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, ll.
they had arrived via Russian, even if it violated the vowel harmony of Turkmen.381 The main result of the 1936 conference, and in 1940 Cyrillicization, was to mirror “the shift in the locus of control from local cultural elites to committees in Moscow” and to eliminate the “nationalistic slant” from the Turkmen language.382

_The Cyrillic Script and Russification_

In 1936 the Central Committee’s Orgburo began reevaluating the use of Latin scripts in the RSFSR. It then formed the Central Scientific Institute of Languages and Alphabets (TsNIIIaP) to oversee subsequent “language construction” or Russification and began changing the North Caucasian and Northern Siberian writing systems to Cyrillic in 1937. By the end of 1938 all languages in the RSFSR officially employed the Cyrillic alphabet.383

Simultaneously, yet in marked contrast, in March 1937 the All-Union Central Committee for the New (Latin) Alphabet and the Central Institute of Languages and Writing of the People of the USSR reasserted use of the Latin alphabet in Turkmenistan and the other Turkic regions.384 The Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR also passed a resolution confirming the place of Latin.385 The two committees appeared to be in direct opposition to one another. The fluctuation in central policy between alphabets was likely a sign that language policy was suffering from a lack of streamlined organization. In the late 1930s the effects of the purges was seen not only in the personnel changeover in specific positions, but the shift in ability and knowledge about official work. With chaos and fear running throughout Soviet administrations, it follows that the bureaucratic work would

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381 ARAN f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, ll. 77-88.
382 Edgar, 2004, p. 161; ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 76..
384 ARAN, f. 676, o. 1, d. 934, l. 101.
385 GARF, f. 3316, o. 13, d. 27, l. 267.
take time to become organized. The opening of Soviet archives has assisted in scholars’
ability to see the chaos and confusion of the Stalin period where we once thought that a
totalitarian state held firm control over state policy.

In fact, it was not long before the bureaucracy worked itself out. In 1937
Turkmenistan’s Ministry of Education introduced Russian language as a subject in all
Turkmen primary and middle schools. Setting in motion the Russification that would
support the “Friendship of the Peoples,” the Central Executive Committee made study of
Russian language in schools obligatory on 13 March 1938. The term “international”
began to be used in a more Russian-oriented fashion. Anti-Russianness was no longer
acceptable and the “alphabet of the Great October [revolution]” became an instrument for
creating an international proletarian culture. The New Alphabet Committee disbanded in
December 1937 and by April 1939 thirty-five languages had shifted to Cyrillic-based
alphabets. The Cyrillic script, used by most Soviet peoples, symbolized the sblizhenie
(merging) of the Soviet peoples into the Sovetskii chelovek (Soviet person).

As early as January 1939, in one of the many examples of citizens aiding the Soviet
state in implementation of Cyrillicization, Turkmen teachers wrote newspaper articles asking
the government to change over to the Cyrillic script. Just as newspapers had been used to
communicate to the public the details of the reformed Arabic script and then the Latin
alphabet, journals for teachers and dailies printed examples and explanations of the new
Cyrillic script. An important Turkmen newspaper in the late 1930s-early 1940s was Struggle

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386 Programma po russkomu iazyku dlia turkmenskih nachal’nykh i nepolnykh srednikh shkol (Ashkhabad: Turkmengosizdat, 1937), pp. 3.
390 Turkmenskata iskra, 6, 14 January 1939; Mugallyma kömek, No. 6, 1940, p. 11.
for Literacy, which reported on schools, enrollment numbers, budgetary matters, literacy statistics, policies related to literacy, and offered teachers advice on lessons and teaching methods.\textsuperscript{391}

The Soviet government had spent more than ten years and an enormous amount of money to implement the Latin script for Muslim languages. The decision to convert the writing of non-Russian groups in Russia to Cyrillic took place even as the All-Union Central Committee for the New Alphabet still existed. The VTsKNA had even been involved in approving Caucasian languages’s adoption of Cyrillic! The “international” character of Latin was the major underlying reason for its widespread implementation in the USSR. However, in the late 1930s the meaning of the word “international” changed. Instead of global or wide reaching in character, “international” came to refer to things Russian, “the most revolutionary and progressive world language.”\textsuperscript{392} Political considerations, such as the “bourgeois” nature of the Latin alphabet, combined with linguistic arguments that the Latin-based system was an “obstacle to the mastery of Russian.”\textsuperscript{393}

Unlike earlier decisions to change writing or education, the decisions to adopt a Cyrillic alphabet and introduce mandatory study of Russian was made at the highest levels of Soviet government. But, as with all policy, the central government relied on the many layers of bureaucracy and especially on the local institutions for full implementation. On 13 March 1938 the Central Committee issued its decree “On the Obligatory Study of the Russian Language in National Republic and Regional Schools.” Promising to increase the number of teachers and classes in the Russian language in schools and offering to provide courses for its

\textsuperscript{391} Annagurdow, 1960, pp. 324-370.
\textsuperscript{392} Fierman, 1991, p. 136.
own staff, the Soviet Orgbiuro, in coordination with local Education Ministries, organized a campaign to develop universal Russian language standards throughout the USSR.394

Turkmen newspapers addressed this directly by asserting that alphabet change would bring the Turkmen language closer to Russian.395 *Turkmenskaia Iskra* explained that the change in script would facilitate literacy because the Russian language was growing increasingly important in schools and students around the Soviet Union were learning the Cyrillic alphabet as well as the script of their native tongue. The Turkmen Party leadership underscored that it made more sense to change the Turkmen language over to the Cyrillic alphabet than to waste time teaching students two separate scripts. By instituting the Cyrillic script, it argued, the Party would make it easier for Turkmen to learn Russian, as well as for other language groups to study Turkmen.396 Proponents avowed, despite the political considerations connected to this script change, that “no harm” would come of it because the peculiarities of the sounds of Turkmen were being taken into consideration. Moreover, with arguments similar to those made about the Arabic script during Latinization, published articles complained that the Latin script did not fully represent all of the sounds of the Turkmen language, and thus was wholly “inconvenient.”397 In effect, this was a change for the better. It was true that Russian and international words borrowed into the Turkmen language would be written by the rules of transliterating Russian as well as according to the

396 Berdiew, 1960, p. 117. For details of the law on Cyrillicization and steps for implementation see *Fourth Session of the High Soviet of TSSR, 10-14 May 1940. Stenographic record*.
397 Annagurdow, 1960, p. 319.
rules of Russian grammar—rather than according to Turkmen—but this was a necessary aspect of the universalizing nature of this reform.398

**Literacy during wartime**

Despite the pressing nature of international events in the late 1930s and early 1940s, on 11 May 1940 the central government approved a Cyrillic alphabet for the Turkmen language.399 The state scheduled all first and second grades of elementary schools to transfer to Cyrillic within the year. Turkmenistan’s Publishing Commission agreed to change over textbooks by 10 May 1940 and to sponsor courses to aid in adult instruction. The Ministry of Education agreed to change over all official writing concerning schools by 1 September 1940.400 Turkmenistan’s Central Committee issued a public decree demanding all print in Turkmenistan to be in Cyrillic by 1 May 1941.401

Literacy was still considered key to forming a progressive society. Enlightenment remained the major issue on the cultural front. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s state statistic gathering agencies, schools and newspapers kept track of the number of schools and students—adult and children. Glowing praise for individual teachers who assisted the processes of universal education and mass literacy, and special students who reflected the success of the Cyrillicization and Russification campaigns, appeared in the press.402

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398 “…şol sanda şu diliň hut öz aýratynlygy bolup durýan sesleri-de.” “Täze elipbiniň projekti dogrysynda düşünürdür,” Yaşkommunist, 4 April 1940, p. 3.
399 GARF f. 5446, o. 1, d. 167, l. 87.
400 TürkmenTAG “Türkmen hatynyň rus elipbisiniň grafigine geçirlmäge tayyarylyk,” Yaşkommunist, 10 April 1940, p. 4.
401 “Türkmeniň täze elipbisini girizmäge tyýarlyk görmek baradaky çäreler hadynda. TK(b)P Merkezi Komitetiniň Byroşynyň 1940-nji ýyl 3-nji apreldede çykaran karary,” Sowet Türkmenistany, 10 April 1940, p. 1.
In 1940 adult literacy in Turkmenistan was estimated at 75%. Still, there was work to be done. The likbez schools introduced the new script, the state funded new libraries, and literacy workers continued to open of clubs and teahouses. The Soviet state pressed adults to take advantage of the opportunities for cultural growth. Steven Lovell writes that the Soviet “reading myth” asserted that a socialist print culture could unite the myriad of peoples similar to the ways that the “literacy myth” promises prosperity by means of literacy. In Ashgabat, Hayrulla Myradow, the supervisor of a meat combine—a “stakhanovit”—shared his personal story in the newspaper *Struggle for Literacy*.

I am fifty-five years old. I have spent most of my life working in a factory. If I were illiterate, working would be difficult. Because I wouldn’t be able to calculate my work; I would be ignorant of news of the daily press.

I thought about attending school to become literate, but I couldn’t study because my factory didn’t offer classes. Everyday my own son Ismail would give me advice, saying, “Dad, you too should study, become literate.” I listened and began studying at home immediately.

Everyday, my son Ismail taught me how to write the easiest words. It finally sunk in and in little while a I knew the letters. I guess that literacy is tied to zeal/diligence. So, then I was literate. I was reading newspapers and journals and everyday I was calculating my own output [in the factory].

Now I am a supervisor at the factory. I surpass the norms and that work earns me 600 manat. Our life has become joyous and happy.

To support the transition, the state published new books in the Turkmen language in Cyrillic such as *A Primer for Children* (50,000 copies), *The Mother Tongue I & II, Grammar I & II* (65,000 copies each), and *Arithmetic I & II* (35,000 copies each). Books for adults also appeared in the new script. The linguist G. Sopiew authored three books for “semi-
literate” adults, including a primer, a grammar, and a general textbook. In summer and fall 1940, the newspapers Sowet Türkmenistan and Mugallymlar Kömek (Teachers’ Aide) carried lessons for learning the new alphabet.409 At the same time, newspapers announced successes such as five hundred teachers enrolling in courses to prepare to introduce the new alphabet in schools.410

With respect to language development, things in Turkmenistan seemed to be progressing. However, just a decade after the positive news of majority adult literacy, the academic J. Amansaryew warned that “chaos” loomed on the cultural front.411 Language content warranted reexamination. Published articles explained that in the Turkmen lexicon, words of Arabic and Persian origin should be replaced with “Soviet-international” words to support industrialization, the theories of the Marxist-Leninist revolution, and aspects of the new [Soviet] life. Words like “medjit, medrese, işan, molla, and bissmilla” [mosque, Islamic college, cleric, clerical teacher, and call to God] should be taken out and words such as partiýa, komsomol, pioneer, and traktor [party, comsomol, pioneer, tractor] should enter.412

As in earlier political eras, the idea of bringing information to a people in their native dialect persisted. It was important that Soviet citizens learn Russian, but it was even more important that they understand the party line. The 1938 decree on mandatory study of Russian also underscored the importance of the local languages.413 Literature, textbooks, and ideology appeared both in Russian and in local languages at a cost borne by the government.

409 They also explained shifts in the details of language. For example, in contrast to earlier decisions, Soviet-international words used in the Turkmen language would reflect the phonology and spelling of those words, rather than the Turkmen pronunciation. TSSR Magaryf Halk Komissarlgynyň Neşri, “Türkmen täze elipbiýiniň dogry yazuw düzgüni,” Mugallymlara Kömek, No. 5, 1940, pp. 3-7.
410 Annagurдов, 1960, p. 351.
412 G. Sarýew, “Türkmen täze elipbisi hakynda,” Yaşkommunist, 12 April 1940, p. 2.
413 Smith, 1998, 0. 160.
In 1940, for example, the state publishing house printed 538,000 copies of Lenin’s 54 book writings in Turkmen in Cyrillic.414

1954 Second Linguistic Conference: Sovietization of Turkmen language content

Despite the work that took place from the 1920s and 1930s, even after Stalin’s death in 1953, Party members saw the Turkmen language as “unstable.” This time the issue was not a question of script, but rather one of spelling and terminology. Turkmen historian Annagurdow writes that, authors, editors, and publishers had not fully adhered to decisions of the First linguistic conference. Terminology remained a significant concern. According to historical linguist Täçmyradow, in the 1940s-1950s the Teke dialect of Turkmen began to overshadow the other dialects due to a heavy presence of Tekes in publishing, radio, cinema, theater and cultural institutions.415 Linguists such as Pigam Azymow began to pay special attention to this problem of dialectic hegemony by providing analyses of the Turkmen lexicon, counting the number of “Soviet-international words” for example.416 The central state became involved, determining as early as 1950 the need for a scholarly conference on terminology417 and announcing it to the public in 1951.418 A linguistic conference was organized in 1954 to address questions of writing Turkmen.

On 6-9 October 1954 Turkmenistan’s Academy of Sciences hosted the Second Linguistic Conference on the Turkmen Language at its Institute of Turkmen Language and Literature in Ashgabat. The conference organizers reported that the need for this meeting lay...

415 Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 73.
in the “failings” of the First All-Turkmen Language conference that had met in 1936. Characteristic of the 1950s, the faults of “traitors” and “wreckers” in the 1920s and 1930s were underscored in order to highlight the politically correct path for Soviets. In the decade that stressed the “Friendship of the Peoples [of the USSR]” mistakes of the past pointed to errors of individuals that had prevented the system from perfection.419

In his preparatory materials, the main organizer, J. Amansaryew, accused the language planners of the 1930s of having created problems in the Turkmen language with their “ideological leanings;” scholars who had been purged in the 1930s were easy targets. The lexical content of the Turkmen language remained a special social-political concern because those “counter-revolutionaries had tried to interject Arabic and Persian terms into the Turkmen vocabulary.” Amansaryew labeled Böriew, Geldiew, Wepaew, and Ferid Efendi “pan-Turkists and pan-Iranists,” accusing them of trying to replace the Turkmen literary with Anatolian Turkish and allow the untamed influences of Arabic and Persian. Amansaryew insisted that they could have taken help from the “great” Russian language, but instead “they turned their faces away” preferring the internal resources of Turkmen.

This 1954 conference appears to have been much smaller in scope than previous meetings. In earlier conferences alphabet, orthography, grammar, and more had to be worked out. In the 1950s, language content was the main focus. The local government created a steering committee, which assigned J. Amansaryew with leading the discussion on linguistic terminology, M. Annagurdow with a presentation on translating Russian literature into Turkmen, and Z. B. Muhammedow a paper on linguistic terminology. B. Şahmyradow addressed literary terminology, A. P. Lavrov geographic terminology, Ö. N. Mämetnyýazow

the vocabulary of chemistry, and N. Geldiew and B. A. Serebrinnikov discussed the substitution of Arabo-Persian words with Russian terms. The state published the prepared papers the following year.

With a focus on standardizing terminology, the participants saw the first step as eliminating “superfluous, parallel” terms. They complained that there was a lack of regularity in the Turkmen language, even in the use of grammatical terms. For example, for the “rules” of language two distinct terms were employed: düzgün (order, system) versus kada (rule, custom). These multiple synonyms, this “chaos,” made it impossible to elucidate the meaning of one word. Moreover, there were different usages for such basic terms as “infinitive.” Elementary schools used a Turco-Persian compound, nâmâlim ışlık, while higher education employed the Russian infinitiv. These sorts of “parallelisms” in school and scholarly terminology caused great consternation in 1954. “If the meaning of one word is shown through parallel terminology the students’ thoughts will be discombobulated. Stalin himself had said so in his own works.” Pigam Azymow added to this subject, explaining that use by some authors of a Turkmen word, such as adalga (terminology), and by others a Russian equivalent, such as termin, created an insurmountable confusion. Synonyms were designated the major obstacle in the realization of “happy socialism” among Turkmen.

At the Second Linguistic Conference, Professor Hydyrow delivered the paper on punctuation, identifying its role as aiding in the creation of a scientific system of writing and

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422 P. Azymow, “Türkmen diliniň käbir meseleleri hakynda,” Ýgyndyda: Türkmen diliniň orfografiýa, punctuatsiýa we terminologiýa meseleleri, p. 11.
with improving reading in schools.\textsuperscript{423} Azymow reviewed the resolution on orthography. He too began by pointing out that despite the number of earlier conferences problems in writing and spelling persisted. Aside from rules for hyphenating proper nouns and spelling complicated suffixes, Azymow addressed the issue of phonetic spelling. In a shift from earlier endeavors to accurately reflect the spoken word in writing, the 1954 proposal suggested that some words would deviate from popular pronunciation. For example, in the case of a word having two parts, it should be written fully, not according to the vernacular: not \textit{Almata}—but \textit{Almaata}; not \textit{Könürgenç}, but \textit{Köneürgenç}.\textsuperscript{424} The one rule quite specific to Turkmen was the spelling of letters “\textit{z, l, n, s}” after a letter “\textit{d}.” These consonants are swallowed in the vernacular, softening the pronunciation: \textit{bizde} becomes [\textit{bizze}], \textit{yoldaş} is pronounced [\textit{yollash}], \textit{destan} is [\textit{dessan}]. Azymow and the other participants ruled that the words should be spelled out in their fullest form, regardless of the spoken form.\textsuperscript{425} This was a noteworthy break in the “write as you hear rule” that had been stressed in earlier decades because it privileged ideology, represented in language content, over spelling, which had represented the Turkmen language community’s identity in writing for so long.

The 1954 congress pushed for standardization, formalization, and space for Russian influences. The conference records indicate that linguistic minutiae were far less important than the development of a socialist lexicon to support the new concepts the Turkmen language was facing. Annagurdow stated clearly that words of Arabo-Persian origin and

archaisms should be eliminated from the literary language.⁴²⁶ G. Ataew seconded this saying that the conference needed to build up the Soviet-international content of the language.⁴²⁷ To that end, the participants provided lists of Russian words that were to be adopted wholesale into Turkmen: for example, *palto, kino, institut, samolët* [coat, cinema, institute, airplane].⁴²⁸ The participants argued that Russian could greatly enhance discussion of technology in Turkmen. However, Russian could also contribute to building a socialist vocabulary for everyday life. An example of change in the Turkmen language, perhaps as a result of the 1954 conference, was a shift from using the Turkmen word *otly* for “train” to the Russian *poezd*, at least in the high-ranking newspaper *Sovet Turkmenistany*. The Party would assist with courses and schools. It would target both visual and audio skills via the radio, cinema, newspapers, and journals. In this way, Turkmen and Russian would co-exist. Indeed, in the end, Annagurdow suggested, “perhaps Russian will be taught in elementary schools as a second mother tongue.”⁴²⁹

**A Socialist Lexicon**

Annagurdow delivered the resolution on terminology. Turkmen intellectuals had been developing neologisms to support political, cultural and scientific lexicons, but Annagurdow explained, without standardization there was no “stability.” He suggested that they pitch “archaisms,” decide upon a one-to-one correspondence between terms and ideas, and formalize use of borrowed words. The resolution wavered between a greater prominence

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⁴²⁶ M. Annakurdov, *Terminologia turkmenskogo iazyka i zadachi ee uluchsheniia,* TSSR YA Magtymguly adyndaky Dil we edebiyat institutynyň golýazmalar fondy, Manuscript holdings of the Language and Literature Insitute named after Magtumguly, No. 160, folder No. 10, p. 239.
⁴²⁷ Ibid, pp. 300-305.
of and reliance on Russian and the continued nationalization of borrowed words. This reflected the socio-political situation more broadly at a time when concern over strengthening the cohesion of the Soviet peoples was on the rise. In support of standardization and a solidification of socialist lexicon, the conference resolved that the TSSR Academy of Science staff be assigned the work of developing socialist terminology and producing technical dictionaries. The resolution provided specific examples of the type of development the participants expected. Foreign terms should enter Turkmen via Russian. Annagurdow offered as an example *L’Humanite*, which would translate into Russian as *chelovechestvo* and then into Turkmen as *adamzat*. Russian terms were to be written with Turkmen suffixes and allusion to gender (despite Turkic languages being ungendered). For example, a female, communal-farm worker in Russian *kolkhoznitsa* would become *kolhoçy ayýal* in Turkmen. R. Esenow and G. D. Sanjeew asserted that words such as *radiofikatsiia* and *kinofikatsia* should be written *radiolaşdyrmak* and *kinolaşdyrmak*. However, prefixes, especially those from foreign languages should derive from Russian: *antifashistik*, *kontrrevolioutsion*. Acronyms would be rendered according to the Turkmen translation. “Central Committee” for example would appear not in the Russian *TsK* (*Tsentral’nyi Komitet*) but the Turkmen MK (*Merkezi Komitet*).

1950s-1970s: the fragments of a literate nation

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430 N. A. Andreev discussed a similar concern regarding the Chuvash language. Because of simultaneous usage of Chuvash and well as Russian terms for international ideas, he suggested the Chuvash literary language rely more heavily on Russian. Täçmyradow, 1984, p. 87.
Turkmenistan’s Ministry of Culture focused on propagandizing the Turkmen-Soviet culture through print. To that end, the 1950s witnessed a growth spurt in libraries, cultural clubs and teahouses, where reading could take place individually and communally.\footnote{In 1958, there were 207 cinemas, 770 cultural clubs, and 932 libraries (with 2 million holdings Türkmenistan SSR-niň ähli medentiýet işgärlerine medeni aň-bilim edalaralary işgärleriniň Birinji gurultayynyň yüzlenmesi (Turkmenistan SSR Cultural Ministry: Ashgabat, 1958), p. 4.} Despite the 1954 conference, intellectuals, especially those at the Turkmen language and literature Institute of the TSSR Academy of Sciences, continued to discuss these issues spelling of acronyms, foreign words, new concepts, and the role of Russian.\footnote{T. Täçmyradow, M. Hudaýgulyew, B. Hojaew, “A review and bibliography of: the Turkmen Orthographic dictionary (Türkmen Diliniň orfografik sözlük),” Soviet Turkmenistany, 31 May 1963, pp. 3.} As expected, the 1960s saw such publications as The Turkmen language in our time, the Turkmen language dictionary, and the Turkmen orthographic dictionary. Nevertheless, despite the resolution of 1954 and the great many works on standardizing Turkmen language lexicon and orthography, Täçmyradow was able to list thirteen pages of errors and inconsistencies he found in the Turkmen press throughout the 1960s-1970s.\footnote{Täçmyradow, 1984, pp. 201-213.} Seven decades of work on the Turkmen language was proving that it is difficult to “perfect” any language.

Throughout the 1950s—1970 s, the Party continued to promote literacy practices as communal activities, with the various fragments of society coming together to support each other. Central Asian women and girls remained of special concern of the state, and workers in education were to pay special attention to female educational needs.\footnote{Proceedings of the First Conference of Turkmenistan’s cultural-educational institutes pp. 5-7.} The Party expected children to receive help in learning to read, not only from teachers, but also from Komsomol (Young Communist League), pioneer groups, and grandparents. Every administrative district
(rayon) was to have a cultural section and a club. Teachers occupied a social space between the state and the people that placed a great deal of responsibility on these professionals. They were expected to embody the ideals of socialism. For example, especially in regions where women were not traditionally publicly active, such as Central Asia, a woman in a position of authority—a teacher or school administrator—made them an agent of social change. Being active in community life aided the development of culture, literacy, and socialist ideals among the people. In palaces of culture, workers’ universities, clubs, and teahouses teachers extended the Party’s propaganda to public places designed to foster community through guided, individual self-improvement.

1985: Gorbachev in Moscow, Nyýazow in Ashgabat

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev gained the most powerful position in the USSR as General Secretary of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, he faced opposition that only intensified with his liberalizing reforms that stripped power from conservative communists. His methods weakened his own power base when “liberal” intellectuals and the general populace had little to fill the void left when Gorbachev dispossessed the Soviet system of its legitimacy. He had offered a three pronged solution to the decaying Soviet system: marketization, an attack on the command economy (that provided the people with no immediate alternatives); democratization, which confronted traditional party power and attacked corruption; and decolonization, a proposal to allow fragmentation of the Union and

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438 Between 1958-1960, 282 winter clubs, 189 summer clubs, 126 libraries and reading houses, and 66 cinemas opened. The Cultural Ministry was also responsible for movie theaters. The administration ordered that the number of “good” movies increase as they were a moral booster for the people. Türkmenistan SSR-niň... Birinji gurultayýnyň yüzlenmesi, 1958, p. 8.

devolution of power to the republics. Gorbachev aimed to soften, or at least neutralize, the conservative “hard-liners” within the Soviet administration, mobilize the intelligentsia in a critique of the traditional system, and stimulate popular support for administrative and social reforms via perestroika [restructuring] and glasnost’ [openness].

The end of Russian as the lingua franca

Soviet policies such as korenizatsiia laid the foundation for the nationalism of the 1990s allowing some nationalist movements to grow out of Soviet era identity policies while others rebelled against the policies that had defined them. Central Asian Turks took advantage of glasnost’ to assert their national identity and announce cultural, political, even ecological, demands. Soviet Turks took to the streets not only over issues of the nationality of their new Party Chairman (Kazakhstan, 1986), territorial integrity (Azerbaijan, 1988), inter-ethnic conflict (Ferghana valley, 1989), but also over language (Kazakhstan, 1986, Uzbekistan 1989), which was considered a “valuable national component.”

Although Russian was named the “language of inter-ethnic communication” in all language laws, except for Estonia’s, reforms signaled the impending decline of Russian language use. In many cases questions of language came to symbolize the general atmosphere in which Soviet “hardliners” and ethnic Russians opposed “reformers” and

442 Suny, 1993.
443 Landau and Heinkele, 2001, p. 61.
“radicals” who threatened Moscow’s central authority. The pro-Russian language/anti-Russian language arguments reflected the broad-based cultural rejuvenation and national reassertion that was taking place throughout the Soviet Union: Kyrgyz students expressed interest in learning the language of their forefathers, Islamic texts began to appear in Uzbek and Turkmen bazaars, and traditional belief systems and practices such as folk healing flourished alongside formal religious practices. Larger concerns about power, sovereignty, and access to economic resources began to manifest themselves as environmental protests, religious assertion, and demands for language reform throughout the Soviet Union—with the Baltic republics in the vanguard. Intellectuals targeted the iconography of everyday life to symbolize the freedoms of the new era and the pride that had never diminished during the previous period. As had so many communities throughout history, the Soviet peoples saw language and alphabet as emblematic of the society they envisioned.

Turkmenistan’s president, Saparmurad Nyýazow, became the head of Turkmenistan’s government in 1985. In the Soviet period he held power at the pleasure of the Party

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apparatus. He then oversaw the election of unopposed candidates to Turkmenistan’s Supreme Soviet, which in turn elected him “President” in November 1990. Nyýazow’s title changed—not for the final time—as the inconstant political atmosphere evolved.

Glasnost’: the language of sovereignty

Declarations of cultural autonomy in the USSR did not wait for full political sovereignty. In the late 1980s various republican representatives and “reformed” communists asserted themselves in policy areas and even more firmly in cultural arenas.450 Glasnost’ allowed for public critique of the Soviet system and its legacy. This soon translated into national and popular fronts that clamored for cultural reforms. In 1988, Estonia and Lithuania established popular fronts, and Estonia declared itself a sovereign republic. The Baltic peoples sought both symbolic and real legitimacy through the declaration of their respective national languages as the state language. Similar undertakings in Georgia and other republics followed with varied success. Non-Russians had resented the role of Russian as the lingua franca of the USSR. Glasnost’ offered the opportunity to discuss the role of local languages and the possibilities of reducing Russian’s role as a language of instruction in schools. By May 1990, all republics, following Estonia’s initiative, had adopted laws raising the status of the titular nationality’s language to the level of the state language.451 Language was a highly visible site for claims of autonomy in the former Soviet Union.452

Citizens, especially teachers, wrote newspaper articles sharing their opinions, fears, and hopes for language and education policies. One Turkmen contributor stressed both the importance of language in placing oneself in the global order as well as the need for local language development.

For Turkmen national culture to be a part of the collective world culture, our people’s development should synthesize the characteristics of general humanity...[thus] as part of a classroom’s work to develop well-bred, cultured children, Turkmen words [should be] taught in the place of Russian words...Literacy [in one’s mother tongue] develops the state internally and allows for relations with the outside world.453

In the years after korenizatsiia, the Russian language’s status had deepened, edging out national languages in public discourse. Scholars trained in Russian, under the Soviet system, often supported bilingualism as a practical measure that supported national claims rather than threatened them. In Turkmenistan, these included Tagangeldi Täçmyradow, doctor of philology in the Turkmen language and Literature Institute within Turkmenistan’s Academy of Sciences. Täçmyradow’s research did much to promote the history of Turkmen language development and provides some of the few studies of Turkmen jadids and nineteenth-century Turkmen language reformers. Yet, he was cautious about post-Soviet linguistic nationalism. While he championed study of Turkmen language and history, he saw Russian language as a useful tool. His articles continued to promote the usefulness of bilingualism, even after independence. Myratgeldi Söýegow was the scholar most responsible for transition to the Latin alphabet in the 1990s. However, he too took a practical approach toward Russian, even while leading the Turkmenification of the alphabet and writing the most scholarly articles about nineteenth-century Turkmen jadids.454

Berdiew, another Turkmen linguist, wrote in a newspaper article, “knowledge of two or even ten languages means greater resourcefulness.”⁴⁵⁵ None of these writers meant to undermine development of Turkmen as a language of instruction or state, but they viewed Russian as an international language. These writers felt, as Gasprinskii demonstrated with his 1883 bilingual newspaper *Tercüman/Perevodchik*, that Turkmen could use the Russian language to their advantage.

**Glasnost’ in Turkmenistan**

As part of Gorbachev’s attempts at decentralization, a 1988 central Party resolution responded to peripheral, ethnic demands that local languages hold the same status as Russian. The resolution demanded “the free development and equal use by all the Soviet Union’s citizens of their own language and the mastery of the Russian language.”⁴⁵⁶ Accordingly, on 24 May 1990 Turkmenistan passed “The Law On Language” that raised Turkmen to the status of the state language: “Turkmen is the state language of Turkmenistan. All citizens have the right to use their native tongue.”⁴⁵⁷ A great many ethnic Turkmen welcomed this law. Like their new flag and anthem, language would reflect the social shifts taking place under *glasnost’*. Language and subsequent cultural policies not only symbolized the importance of the national language, they concurrently provided ethnic Turkmen with opportunity and encouragement to seize forms of power they had long sought. Instead of Russian, the Turkmen language became the conduit to political, economic, and social power. Turkmen speakers began to occupy the spaces once held by Soviet elites.

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⁴⁵⁷ It was repeated in the 1992 Constitution in Section I, Article 13.
Nationalist eruptions and economic protests compounded the effects of failed Soviet policies, causing Gorbachev to lose his hold on power in a coup in August 1991. The USSR disintegrated as Moscow recognized declarations of independence republic-by-republic. As in so many other republics, the Chairman of the Turkmen SSR’s Communist Party, Saparmyrat Nyýazow, retained his position during the country’s transition to an independent state. During the coup attempt against Gorbachev, Nyýazow waited silently, denouncing it only after its failure was unmistakable. Turkmenistan declared its sovereignty on 22 August 1990 and independence on 27 October 1991, marking its independence with a sad nod to its Soviet past in choosing to mark independence on the anniversary of its entrance into the USSR. It joined the Commonwealth of Indendent States on 21 December 1991.

**Popular opinion about alphabets in Independent Turkmenistan, 1991**

In independent Turkmenistan, public debate about bilingualism and national pride in language began to flourish not only among linguists and educators, but also in the general public. Academic studies provided linguistic or cultural advice in order to promote increased use of Turkmen. Turkmen became the primary language of instruction in schools, government offices, medicine, science, and law. The new status of Turkmen led to discussions of further socio-cultural reforms, including a script change. Throughout the USSR, ethnic groups began talking about renouncing the Cyrillic script they had used since 1939/40.

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Turkmenistan’s populace joined in public debates over whether the script should change, and how. These published observations were part of an authentic expression of agency found in the public debate that took place among Turkmen in the earliest years of their independence. Although the state took ultimate responsibility for language and alphabet reform, the populace participated in their shaping. The press of the early 1990s provided a forum for expression of personal opinion, and created space for a form of civil society that would not survive the decade.461

A variety of citizens published their opinions regarding the representation of foreign words, especially those ubiquitous terms from Russian. These conversations were fueled by the academic question: Why should the Turkmen alphabet contain the letters ў [sh], ў [shch], ж [zh] and soft signs, ь and ь? Scholars noted that these letters had no significance for the Turkmen language, were used only in foreign words, and thus should be eliminated. One article in particular elicited a great deal of public response.462 Turkmen linguists Azymow and Çaryýarow suggested in a scholarly article, which was reprinted in the popular press, that in addition to the five letters listed above the sounds represented by Cyrillic letters ё [yo], ю [yu], я [ya], т [ts], and ч [ch] should be eliminated from the Turkmen.463 They insisted, as had their nineteenth-century forefathers that “every phoneme [sound] should be represented by one grapheme [letter].” Some Turkmen agreed, some disagreed vehemently.

Each opinion addressed Azymow and Çaryýarow by name, and often responded directly to other citizens who had written.

Some Turkmen felt that it was not the best time in Turkmenistan’s history to bother with alphabet reform. “In this paper shortage, why should we waste time, spend lead, use up the paper we do have, just to play with people’s nerves [with alphabet change]?” The writer also stressed that he felt that the issue should not be determined only by academics. Hoping to see a larger cross-section of the citizenry participate he asked, “Don’t others have the right?” But he was in the minority of participating citizens. Citizens expressed their opinions, but few expressed concern about the President’s delegation of language and alphabet reform to academics.

Turkmenistan’s citizens took part in the shaping of Turkmenification by writing to newspapers and publishing their opinions about education in teacher’s journals. Articles asked why Russian words were used when there were perfectly acceptable Turkmen words. Teachers asked for books in Turkmen, but they didn’t want translations from Russian. They insisted that books should be “completely rewritten with respect to the exigencies of local conditions.” Teachers wanted to bring local nuances to the framework of global topics such as biology and medicine.

Turkmen were aware that such reforms were being undertaken in other former republics. An interview with the Moldovan education minister illustrated that his community was already working on education reform, making Moldovan the language of instruction, as

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well as toward Latinization of their Cyrillic script.468 These examples were to be emulated in Turkmenistan’s strategies of self-redefinition. The same newspaper ran a short article about progress being made at one particular Turkmen elementary school when the Director delivered a speech “in his native tongue” during “Turkmen Language Week.”469

When Turkmenistan became an independent country on October 27, 1991 the majority of the population spoke the Turkmen language. According to Soviet Population Censuses, the percentage of Turkmen claiming good command of their native language was in 1970—98%; 1979—98.7%, 1989—98.5%. The same records indicate command of Russian respectively at 15.4%, 25.4%, and 27.7%.470 Even with allowance for a generous measure of error, these statistics indicate that fewer than half of the Turkmen population had command of the Russian language. Nevertheless, business and most state activities, including higher education, were conducted almost exclusively in Russian, the language of the central, Soviet power in Moscow.

Conclusion

Cyrillicization was as an important symbolic act of the Stalin period, one that underscored the Russifying tendencies of the post-purge years. Yet, little is written about the inner workings of Cyrillicization in the USSR because many of the details have yet to be uncovered. Even with access to archival sources, scholars continue to ask questions: Who made the final decision? Was there any debate at any echelon? Was it a decree from Stain that went unquestioned? What has been revealed however is that, as with all Soviet policy, it took great numbers of people to implement Cyrillicization. Teachers, parents,

470 Cited in Landau and Heinkele, 2001, p. 56.
administrators, and Party officials had to play a part in the process for it to be realized. Even if Cyrillization was simply an unchallenged directive from Stalin it took great numbers to carry it out in daily life. For years it was summarized as an act of Moscow in which the center bestowed, or forced, Cyrillic alphabets on non-Russian peoples. The sources examined here help to shed light on how confused and muddied the implementation of Cyrillicization was. They also illustrate how, in the process of script change, some groups and individuals gained power and opportunity while other lost it.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s and into the 1980s, the issue of Russification persisted as a point of contention for some national groups. Even Gorbachev’s glasnost’ did not satisfy the nationalities’ growing hunger for cultural autonomy.471 In 1991, the peoples of Central Asia acquired for themselves sovereign political status, cultural independence, and a great deal of natural and energy resources. However, they also inherited from the Soviet Union a crumbling infrastructure, a dysfunctional political system, and scant technological, industrial or scientific means of supporting themselves. With so many immediate material concerns, it is remarkable that alphabet become a matter of focus in these new states. Would a change in language status make a real difference in everyday life? According to published sources, at least some of Turkmenistan’s citizens thought so.

In the post-Soviet period (chapter 5), cultural reform was marked by expectations that a Latin script would best symbolize a unified Turkmen speech community, and the Turkmen’s collective place in the world. In the years following independence, a principal means of legitimizing Nyýazow’s position was his assertion of Turkmen cultural identity in

place of the Russian-language dominated Soviet culture. This included eradication of the Cyrillic alphabet as well as establishing the primacy of Turkmen over Russian language. In promoting his own ethnic and linguistic ties to the people, Nyýazow positioned himself as the one man who could rule the country on behalf of the Turkmen. For generations, many Turkmen had felt restricted to a lesser social status. Pursuing a style of nation-building similar to that of many post-colonial countries, Nyýazow capitalized on this historical resentment through social and political policy, such as making Turkmen the official language of state and changing the alphabet. Questions of language and identity arose within these much larger debates about the political status of culture in geopolitics and international relations. The next chapter discusses how symbols of power changed as political conditions evolved and why in 1993 Turkmenistan chose to adopt a Latin-based writing system rather than an Arabic or Cyrillic script.

472 Turkmenistan never seriously considering a return to the pre-Soviet Arabic script. Unlike the Tajiks, sharing a Persian heritage with Iran, who did return to the Arabic.
CHAPTER 5


“Turks, whenever given the opportunity to think about their own identity, have put high on the agenda questions revolving around language, writing and hence the alphabet.”

Changes in language and education—literacy, more broadly—that took place in independent Turkmenistan after 1991 reflected a continuity of the Soviet programs. They were also clear response to the years of Soviet domination and control. That is, cultural policy represented an effort to break with that Soviet past. These changes took place in the very specific international context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in which states around the world perceived the chance to re-create the “world order.” The U.S. and other western entities gained access to former Soviet peoples. Turkey, in particular, felt encouraged to take a more active role in regional and global affairs through its “natural” influence with the other Turkic peoples of Central Asia. Despite the nature and pressures of the international situation, the Turkmen took a path very much of their own making. Turkmenification, a concept so important to the 1910s and 1920s, took on a new importance in the post-Soviet era. As in the earlier eras, Turkmen chose the alphabet to reflect the momentous events in political policy—and daily life.

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Like so many societies that emerged from a communist state at the end of the twentieth century, Turkmenistan reformed its writing system to mark its place in the new world order. Post-Soviet Turkmenistan’s 1993 adoption of a Latin alphabet symbolically severed Turkmen culture from the Soviet past. Yet, it also marked continuities in general themes that had persisted for more than a century. Late-nineteenth century jadid efforts to promote modernity via literacy, alphabet, and modern education had continued into the early Soviet period. Belief in the symbolic power of alphabets continued into Turkmenistan’s early years of independence. In many respects, language laws and educational policies in the 1980s and 1990s formed specifically in opposition to Soviet era practices. Yet, the 1990s also reflected enlightenment trends that had been present before communism. In fact, these trends could and do refer as much to the whole process of cultural change as they do to the alphabet reforms. Alphabet and education are but two manifestations of a pervasive cultural phenomenon that western scholars described as a “precarious balancing act between continuity and change.”

Once subject to Moscow’s centralized authority, independence empowered Nyýazow to maneuver Turkmenistan according to domestic concerns—and his own. He focused on cultural issues as the first step to legitimizing his place in the newly forming structure. President Saparmurat ‘Türkmenbaşy’ Nyýazow had been in the leadership position since he was appointed First Secretary of Turkmenistan’s Communist Party in 1985; in 1990 his title changed to president. In 1992 and 1994, he ran unopposed in referendums, in which, according to official results, he received a remarkable 98.5% of the votes. In 1999, the

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legislature decided to name Nyýazow president for life. Nyýazow did not simply retain his leadership position he mastered methods of continuously increasing his personal power. By means of state policy, he adopted popular and intellectual views toward language and identity, allowing the country to explore its independence with a reinvigoration of national identity. Turkmenification had begun under Gorbachev, but was perfected under Nyýazow.

_Turkic power, identity, and language: Turkey and the Common Turkic Script_

The ‘New World Order’ is a term that emerged in western discourse after the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991. The phrase refers to the imbalances created in global power at the end of the Cold War. American political actors envisioned new democracies and free markets while some scholars wrote of the ‘end of ideology’—actually a term from the 1950s. Inspired by cultural and linguistic ties with Turks in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey sought to position itself as a bridge between east and west. Such visions combined into the concept of a “Turkish model” that promoted Turkey as a counter-balance to Russia’s legacy and a western envoy that would stave off Iranian or radical Islamic

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476 The CSCE 1993 Report asserted that _glasnost_ “barely penetrated into the republic and thus made little difference to daily life in Turkmenistan,” p. 187. This cynical position ignores cultural reforms.
477 For the most concise argument covering the development of this phrase and its meaning, see Will Myer, _Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Central Asia_ (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 222-244, who also refers to a “neo-colonial situation” and a “new great game”.
In the end, despite the motives of great powers, the Central Asian states rejected such a role for Turkey and made their decisions and located themselves within the new world order as their leaders saw fit.

In the first years of independence among the former Soviet republics, Turkey endeavored to capitalize on its cultural affinity with Turkmen, offering to play the role of big brother. Turkish president Turgut Özal led summits focusing on economic and trade relations, legislative matters, and regional security issues. Language and education were two of the first socio-cultural arenas to receive specific attention in the so-called “Ankara Declaration,” which resulted from the Ankara Summit in October 1992.481

In November 1991, Marmara University in Istanbul hosted the first symposium on alphabet reform for the former Soviet Turks.482 Turcologists from Turkey and the former Soviet Republics put forth and discussed alphabet drafts, ultimately agreeing on a joint Latin alphabet with thirty-four letters. Nevertheless, this was only an academic proposal. Turkish scholar, Mustafa Öner suggests that the meeting took on an idealistic tone because teachers, statesmen, publishers and technicians were absent. Furthermore, the proposed alphabet remained only a suggestion because the various Turkic groups pressed to have their regional and dialectical differences represented in the new writing system.483

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Again in May and September 1992 the Turkish government organized conferences to discuss language and alphabet issues among all Turkic groups, both in Europe and in Asia.\textsuperscript{484} “\textit{Ortak Türk yaz\'ı dili}” [A Common Turkic written language] was a reoccurring topic in these exchanges.\textsuperscript{485} It also became a trope for the relationship that was anticipated among Central Asian Turks and the Turkish Republic.\textsuperscript{486} Invoking the name of Ismail Gasprinskii, the nineteenth-century Tatar intellectual who actively promoted a common Turkic language and script, Turkish scholars pointed out the common aspects of the regional dialects, the dialects’ ability to employ the same symbols for expression, and the common heritage that united Turks. A doyenne of Turcology, Zeynep Korkmaz, cited in her presentation Gasprinskii’s slogan “\textit{dilde, fikirde, İşte birlik}” [unity in language, ideas, and efforts] concluding that conditions in the post-Soviet era had once again made relevant the questions of Turkic language and script. She suggested that official organs within the Republic of Turkey and in the other Turkic republics should lead Turkic communities in resolving these issues.\textsuperscript{487}

Turkish scholars proposed a Common Turkish Script and a blurring of regional distinctiveness. By extension this implied an eventual predominance of the dialect spoken in the Turkish Republic. Evinced in comments by such Turkish representatives as State Minister Ercument Konukman, who declared that ‘in the years to come, Turks in surrounding states will form independent states under the Turkish flag.”\textsuperscript{488} Such proposals made Soviet

\textsuperscript{484} Sürêkli Türk Dili Kurultayı (Permanent Turkish Language Council), Kültür Bak., 4-8 Mayis 1992 and at the International Turkic Language Congress, 26 September-1 October 1992, sponsored and records published by the Türk Dil Kurumu (Turkish Language Council).


\textsuperscript{487} Zeynep Korkmaz, 1996, pp. 190-91.

\textsuperscript{488} Nicole and Hugh Pope, 1997, p. 281.
Turks uneasy. Its ominous tone portended the potential for another form of cultural hegemony.

Despite the larger concerns about cultural sovereignty and pan-Turkism, the 1992 Ankara Language conference accepted a slightly different version of the 1991 proposed Latin alphabet. The participants were certain its use would become a reality when Azerbaijani representatives accepted the proposal. However, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan declined, suggesting that they would face difficulties—political and practical—in their own countries.\(^{489}\) Turkish scholars were encouraged by the other Turkic groups’ desire to open up to Turkey and the world via alphabet symbolism. However, only the Turkish Republic employed a “Common Turkic Script,” and only when writing to other Turkic groups.\(^{490}\)

**The “New National Turkmen Alphabet”**

Rejecting Turkey’s offer to act as a “big brother,” Central Asian Turks chose to create new alphabets to highlight a new form of independent, national consciousness. Rather than a shared alphabet, each state independently created its own.\(^{491}\) In 1993, the Turkmen president announced, with at least nominal support from the academic community, that over a 3-year period, Turkmenistan would adopt a Latin-based “Turkmen National Alphabet.” He explained in speeches and in the press that

creating a new Turkmen alphabet based on the Latin script would hasten the young country’s progress toward intellectual, cultural and social strength. And, it would expedite means for Turkmenistan’s joining the

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\(^{490}\) Öner, 1998, p. 76.

world civilization and taking its own worthy place among developed
countries.492

At the September 1992 language conference in Ankara, Turkmen scholars Pigam
Azymow and Myratgeldi Söýegow spoke about possibilities for a new alphabet in
independent Turkmenistan. “The Law on Language” spurred newspapers and journals, radio
and television to inspire popular support for perfection of the Turkmens’ Cyrillic alphabet.
Demands about changing over to a Latin-based writing system soon muffled the calls for
further Cyrillic. In the same year, several Turkmen authors offered suggestions about
alphabet reform.

At a press conference at the May 1992 Ashgabat Summit of the former Soviet Central
Asian republics, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, a journalist asked President Saparmyrat
Nyýazow, “Mr. President, what can you tell us about the transition to a new Latin-based
alphabet? When will it happen?” The president responded, “Our scholars are working on
this. However, to address the matter fully will take a minimum of three years.”493 Scholars
agreed with the president, writing that such multi-faceted issues cannot be fixed in a hurry.
Nyýazow elaborated on this position in his 18 January 1993 presentation to the Academy of
Sciences, saying that the state was responsible for alphabet reform, both materially and
intellectually. Nyýazow framed the question of the national alphabet as important to
economic as well as a significant to political issues in the newly independent country. He
noted, for example, his hope that the national currency, the manat, as well as Turkmen

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493 Azymow we Söýegow, 1999, p. 73.
citizens’ passports would soon be printed in the new Turkmen alphabet. Scholars too stressed the material role of alphabet, noting that the development of the Turkmen language, popular press, national culture and such things are tied to economics and politics. Both the president and the concerned scholars made clear that they saw the cultural and language as parts of the larger questions Turkmenistan faced in its new political configuration. Linguists and state representatives worked together to produce the symbols of Turkmen independence.

At the 1992 Ankara conference, Söýegow and Azymow announced the Turkmen state’s official position, “Turkmenistan’s decision to make the Turkmen language the official state language marked the fundamental change in Turkmenistan’s positioning in the global order.” Many ethnic Turkmen felt that their new nation had emerged from a colonial situation. Thus, it was inappropriate to revert wholesale to the 1926 Latin-based script designed by the “colonial” Soviet power. However, academics did advise taking lessons from the earlier reforms to avoid unnecessary mistakes, although they did not state specifically what could be learned. Attention to language and alphabet also led to questions of relations between Turkmen and other Turkic groups. Azymow and Söýegow agreed with the concept behind the 1992 Ankara conference, conceding that in fact it would most likely be beneficial to carry out Turkmen alphabet reform in coordination with other Turkic groups. Moreover, it would not hurt, they said, to bear in mind Turkey’s long and “rich” experience with a Latin-based alphabet. They considered Turkey’s alphabet, but they also took care to look at the German writing system, which they noted possess sounds similar to those in

495 Azymow and Söýegov, 1996, p. 73.
496 Azymow and Söýegov 1996, p. 75.
Turkic languages that they mark with diacritics (*umlauts*).\(^{499}\) After all, this alphabet reform was not simply a matter of signifying Turkmenistan’s independence as a Turkic nation, but as a country among countries. The language reformers took seriously the concepts available from non-Turkic languages.\(^{500}\)

However, in the end, Turkmenistan pursued an alphabet “based on its own unique letters in order to mark every single [Turkmen] phoneme.”\(^{501}\) The approach stemmed from an effort to maintain the level of literacy: to mark every phoneme with an individual grapheme, scholars believed, would facilitate learning to read; the one sound-one signifier approach would make learning to read and write easier; and it would aid in reading words as they are in the spoken language.\(^{502}\) The phonetic method that had dominated nineteenth-century alphabet reform remained an important linguistic issue.

**Literacy and information technology**

Nyýazow himself noted that he expected the new Turkmen alphabet to raise literacy.\(^{503}\) Independent Turkmen felt strongly about the direct link between alphabet and literacy. There was not the same need for haste as there had been in the *jadid* era, when literacy rates were under 10%.\(^{504}\) Still, reformers were aware that any changes in the language could affect mass literacy. The president called for the development of new

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\(^{499}\) Aziymow and Söýegow, 1998, p. 75.

\(^{500}\) This is especially notable in the modifications adopted in the 1996 alphabet, discussed below.


\(^{502}\) Aziymow, 1998, p. 74

\(^{503}\) Türkmenbaşy, 1994, pp. 33-34.

\(^{504}\) In 1989 and 1993 the UNDP and the Turkmen Academy of Science jointly estimated Turkmenistan’s literacy rate at 99%. This is perhaps an exaggeration, but is based on the best available sources. United Nations Development Program with assistance from the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan, *Turkmenistan Human Development Report 1996* (Ankara: Ajans-Türk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş., 1996).
textbooks, identifying it as Turkmen linguists’ primary consideration for “they must not allow mass literacy in the mother tongue to fall during the alphabet transition.”

President Nyýazow and several academics perceived a direct link between the Latin script and the English language, in which they recognized international currency. He explained, “just as the Cyrillic alphabet had aided in Turkmens’ learning Russian, the new [Latin] alphabet will assist the populace in their learning English.” Moreover, in every speech he gave in 1993, he mentioned the importance of information technology as the “number two” reason for pursuing a Latin-based script; the “number one” reason was cultural pride.

In 1993, President Nyýazow demanded that every classroom house a computer. Although that year’s alphabet reform placed even more emphasis on the symbolism of the writing system than jadid proposals had, there were parallel considerations, such as literacy—this time with regard to computers. Turkmen scholars and the president felt strongly that Turkmenistan would soon be using computers and the internet. Information technology was one area in which the Turkmen government accepted international aid. Turkmen citizens slowly gained access to computers imported from Dubai and Abu Dhabi and internet connections via the state internet provider Turkmentelekom. Users viewed this access to information and the larger world as an important aspect of their new independence.

The smallness of their five-million-count population combined with the restrictions of the

505 Türkmenbasy, 1994, pp. 33-34.
506 Türkmenbasy, 1994, pp. 33-34.
507 Nyýazow, 1994, p. 5.
509 Western human rights organizations expressed concern over Turkmen citizens’ access to the internet. Erika Daily, at the Soros Foundation, sees the situation as a state restricting access to the world. In fact, while the state does meddle in internet access, the greater cause for lack of internet access in Turkmenistan stems from individuals’ inability to afford personal computers.
Soviet period had left Turkmen feeling cut off from the rest of the world. Even within the 
USSR a sense of backwardness had haunted the Turkmen as they worked to maintain their 
culture and customs. Students at the International Turkmen-Turkish University, who were 
some of the first to receive internet accounts and moderate access, saw themselves on the 
cutting edge of progress.510

Implementation of Latin II: 1993

Scholars, teachers, citizens had weighed in and the president had made up his mind: 
but the question remained about how to implement a Latin-based alphabet. Turkmenistan’s 
government created a six man advisory commission to carry out the details of Latinization, 
which a larger group of academics later endorsed.511 The “Turkmen Language’s New 
Alphabet State Advisory Commission” created a thirty-letter alphabet.512 Commission 
members (a combination of state officials and academics) were determined to create a 
specifically Turkmen alphabet and wanted to differentiate it from the 1926 Latin alphabet—
in order to reflect their place in the new global order. Still, they based twenty-six of the 
three new letters on the previous alphabet, implying that they wanted to employ their 
historical experience.

The commission then recommended the reform to the public via the press, stressing 
that it was imperative to change from the Cyrillic to the Latin script in a manner that 
preserved comprehension. Certain scholars stressed that while the move from Cyrillic made 
sense, they could not ignore the fact that popular literacy was vested in that script. This was 
one reason for the state’s decision to undertake alphabet reform in an unhurried manner.

510 Personal observations as an Instructor of English at the International Turkmen-Turkish University, 1997. 
511 Members of the Turkmenistan Academy of Sciences. 
512 Myratgeldi Söyegow and Nyýazberdi Rejepow, Täze Türkmen elipbiýi (Așgabat: Ruh, 1993).
Aşgabat did not follow Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s 1928 example of Latinization in the Turkish Republic, which allowed for transition in only a three-month period. Rather, it relied on its own history, planning implementation over the period from 1993-1995. The commission began with street signs and newspaper mastheads and broadened slowly from there. The schools began with the first grades and each subsequent year expanded the focus to include the upcoming class, keeping pace between classroom instruction, teacher training and development of new textbooks. Government offices were the final targets for reform.

Turkmenistan’s government engineered the transition to a new alphabet, using newspapers, television and radio to inform the populace. Beginning in 1992, various authors published articles to communicate their support of the new Latin-based writing system. Despite the costs incurred, the new alphabet acted as a symbol of Turkmenification because it simultaneously asserted a separate and distinct national identity, even while moving Turkmenistan one symbolic step closer toward its Turkic brethren. In eradicating Soviet Cyrillic, Aşgabat signaled an anti-Russian cultural stance that was moving swiftly throughout the former Soviet Union. Strong voices within the ethnic Turkmen community supported reform as a means for underscoring their nation’s newly acquired power.

On 12 April 1993 President Nyýazow announced that Turkmenistan would adopt a new Latin-based script in place of their Cyrillic alphabet. On the same day the Mejlis (Assembly of Deputies) passed a resolution in support of Nyýazow’s decision. The transition, scheduled to take place between 1993-1995, would further the aims of the 1990 Law on Language and the reforms planned in education. The president explained that the Cabinet of Ministers in cooperation with the Academy of Sciences and regional officials

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would oversee the creation and implementation of a new alphabet for the Turkmen language. In June, he provided his rationale for reform and his expectations in the “State Program for the Implementation of The New Turkmen Alphabet in Turkmenistan, 1993-1995.” These included enhancing Turkmenistan’s cultural revival, its ability to communicate with other countries, and citizens’ access to information technology and computers.

Nyýazow’s first goal of Latinization was to express Turkmen identity. His second goal, access to global computer technology, did not clash with the former, but it challenged the alphabet reformers to devise one system suitable to both goals. The President made a separate presentation to the Mejlis in which he discussed the highlights of Latinization. He devoted a third of that speech to access to information technology and the idea that a Latin script would facilitate use of computers. To that end President Nyýazow himself insisted that all letters in the new alphabet be taken from signs found on computer keyboards.

The 1993 New Turkmen National Alphabet made clear President Nyýazow’s insistence that the new alphabet accord with western technology. Instead of borrowing letters from the Turkish alphabet or the Common Turkic Script, the Turkmen alphabet committee chose “universally recognized signs”: $,č [sh], £ [zh], ю [ïi], ň [ng]. However, it was not well received. In 1995, Professor Söýegow explained in a newspaper article that the alphabet commission had modified the 1993 alphabet. “$” would no longer represent [sh]. Instead they chose Ş because, they explained, that not all computers in

517 Söýegow, 1995, p. 34.
Turkmenistan possessed the $ symbol. They stressed that they wanted this alphabet to correspond with computers.\textsuperscript{518}

\textit{Modifications: 1996}

By 1996 the commission had also replaced £, ₪, ñ with ž, ý, and ň. Not long after that they again changed ý to ý. It is understandable that a new country faced for the first time with the responsibilities of managing a modern national system would accomplish some tasks in fits and starts. The changes in the alphabet illustrate that Turkmen were adapting as quickly as they could to circumstances around them. It cost time and money to modify the alphabet. Books with the 1993 version became obsolete in just two years time. Public signage, purchased from a company in Moscow, changed again and again. Teachers had to keep up and ensure that students were learning the new letters. The state began printing packages and labels for products in the new alphabet. In the case of a local brand of sugar cubes the packaging had been printed according to the first alphabet proposal in 1993. The letter ň appeared in the word Türkmenistanyň. However, after the 1996 reforms the letter ň replaced ñ. The factory had to correct thousands of boxes of sugar by covering the old ň with tiny stickers showing the letter ñ to spell: Türkmenistanyň Altyn Asyr önümi [Turkmenistan’s Golden Era product]. The symbols of independence did not come cheaply.

Implementation of the New Turkmen National Alphabet symbolized not only desovietization, but also very serious concerns about how to mark the nation as it joined the “countries of world civilization.” Once the government decided on a final form it turned its attention to education. Questions of the national language still loomed as Turkey persisted in its proposals and the ethnic Russian community, along with many Soviet educated Turkmen,

began to grumble about the hardships of language reform. Parents thought it bad enough that they had to deal with new language and alphabet in the workplace, but they were thoroughly disgruntled that their Russian-speaking children faced an increased use of Turkmen in the schools. Meanwhile, because the language of instruction had changed from Russian to Turkmen, the state had to quickly train more teachers in literary Turkmen. Education reforms in 1993 upset the system dramatically. In the following years, language and education would be among the greatest social concerns among Turkmenistan’s citizenry and the state’s greatest undertakings.

**Turkey and other Turkic language communities**

In October 1992 Turkish president Turgut Özal organized a Turkic summit designed to bring the world of Turks together with a free trade zone, mutual customs agreements, joint banks and other business ventures. Özal was disappointed when he realized the variances in personalities of the leaders, regional needs, and surprisingly different national languages. In those early days of independence, Russian was still the common language among Turkic delegations. Although some academics were enthusiastic about a new Turkic common literary language, the majority of Central Asian Turks were not. Yet the Turkish government kept funding scholarship about Central Asia, so the academics kept at it. Still, as early at 1994 Büsra Ersanlı Bahar, a Turkish academic who worked in the field,

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519 Some Turkish diplomats understood the goal to be “a kind of Turkish commonwealth.” Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1997), 289.


admitted ‘We [Republican Turks] came to realize that the Turkish language that we [thought] we shared…was insufficient as our relations became more varied and richer.’

Turkey was still struggling with the degrees of difference between regional dialects, and the Central Asian Turks were still considering how best to assert their regional distinctiveness. A common Turkic language would not suit them.

*Turkish influence in Turkmen Education*

The Turkish Republic achieved part of its drive for influence in Central Asia through language but it achieved even more in the field of education. During the first years of independence Turkey donated millions of dollars to Central Asia and Azerbaijan in the form of textbooks, popular histories, and language primers in the languages of those countries. The Turkish government created scholarships for Central Asian students. Turkish organizations offered free Turkish language classes and inexpensive English classes in public spaces like the former Soviet Circus. The World Bank, the IMF and EBRD gave loans to Turkish companies to support entrepreneurship and create private sector jobs.

The Turkish Republic provided financial and material support to Turkmenistan’s redesign of its educational system. President Turgut Özal (1980-1993) visited Central Asia and later President Süleyman Demirel (1993-2000) made several public statements stating Turkey’s readiness to aid their cultural brethren. Material support came in the forms of scholarships for Turkmen students to study in Turkey, the printing and publishing of

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523 M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity Politics and Central Asia,” in Sagdeev and Eisenhower, 2000,
thousands of books in the new alphabet, a Turkish section in the Turkmenistan State Library, and the establishment of two schools in Ashgabat. 524

The Turkish Government established several institutes including: in 1993, one primary school, İlk Öğretim Okulu and a high school, the Anadolu Lisesi; a Turkish Language Center (TÖMER),525; and a Vocational Training Center (YAMEN) in 1996. 526

The Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA), organized programs including Turkish cultural centers, student and teacher exchange programs, academic conferences, scholarships for university students, the opening of the Turkish language schools (TÖMER), training for banks and management personnel, broadcasting to Eurasia, and training for public administrators and bureaucrats. 527

**Conclusion**

In the post-Soviet era, Turkmenistan chose Turkmenification of cultural and social systems, linking their national identity to the place they hoped to occupy in the technologically driven, English language directed, international world. Anti-Russian, cautiously pro-Turkish, and intrigued by international power, Turkmenistan experimented with globalization, foreign relations, and the international market.

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524 Türk Cumhuriyet Bakanlığı ve Türkmenistan arasında Eğitim İş Protokolü, 1992; which was mildly revised by a 1996 protocol, but the intentions were the same.

525 In 2004 a 3-month course cost 300,000 manats ($13). Since 1993 1,847 certificates have been awarded. There are currently 249 students and 5 teachers. Clement, 2004.

526 Since it opened 1760 have received certificates. In 2004 there were 259 students; for a 4-month program they paid 200,000 manats (under $10). All of these institutes are in Ashgabat. This training center offers courses in plumbing, electronics, weaving/embroidery, sewing, and textiles. Students receive a certificate at the end of their study and have practical, marketable skills. Clement, 2004.

Changes in language and education in early post-Soviet Turkmenistan represented both a continuity of Soviet programs as well as a clear rejection of Soviet domination and control. Social and cultural programs were some of the first arenas in which former Soviet peoples broke with that Soviet past. Language was perhaps the most illustrative. Nationalist and internationalist activities in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, such as joining the United Nations (1995), making Turkmen the language of instruction in schools, and adopting a Latin-based script, represented a clear backlash against Soviet policies. They simultaneously expressed interest in themes that had been important to center and periphery since the nineteenth century: standardized language, education, and mass literacy as a means for securing economic conditions and preserving values in a changing world.

While basic themes perpetuated the Turkmen experiences between 1904-2004, changes in political realities and the details of everyday life shifted dramatically. Not unlike the social shifts that occurred among Turks in the late-nineteenth century, the 1980s and 1990s brought opportunities for the Soviet nationalities to redefine themselves within a changing world order. In the nineteenth century Turks and Muslims sought to preserve their heritage in a world where modern concepts, colonial experiences and a declining Ottoman Empire, threatened Islamic traditions. In the late-twentieth century, the same Muslim peoples witnessed a declining Soviet Empire, the opportunity to embrace modern technological and scientific advantages, and a chance to seize cultural autonomy and political independence as they put their colonial experience behind them. Turkmenistan addressed the recurrent themes within the framework of Turkmenification.

Turkmen along with other Central Asians participated in active debates about identity, economic relations and regional politics, but in the end each decided to pursue
nationalisms based in large part on their pre-modern Turco-Muslim identity and to a degree on their modern Soviet identities. The need to experience an identity, or identities, through the written language persisted. Turkmen, like several other groups, decided to design an alphabet that would refer to their Turkic-ness, but without subsuming themselves within the Turkic world. Just as nineteenth-century jadids had several loci of enunciation from which to position themselves, independent Turkmenistan had several historical identities upon which to locate themselves within the new world order. They chose a nationally oriented, world alphabet over one that symbolized their membership in the Turkic cultural continuum.

Defined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Turkmenification took place in a very specific international context. Shifts in political systems offered former Soviet peoples the chance to re-create themselves in what was a “new world order.” President Nyýazow and Turkmen academics selected a new Latin-based Turkmen national alphabet to mark the sentiments of Turkmenification as well as to position the Turkmen for the technology of the twenty-first century. Turkey’s opportunity to take a more active role in regional and global affairs through its influence among other Turkic peoples became an important international issue. If Turkey were to expand its sphere of influence, that would preclude Saudi Arabia or Iran from laying roots in Central Asia. Despite the nature and pressures of the international situation, the Turkmen took a path very much of their own making. Turkmenistan’s President Nyýazow oversaw his country’s response to its new global context and saw to it that Turkmen responded to their own history and internal cultural needs. In its earliest years of independence Nyýazow’s decisions to to establish a politically and militarily neutral state and to seek membership in the United

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528 Türkmenistanyň Prezidenti S. A. Nyýazow, 1993-ýylyň 25-nji iýundaky No. 1380-nji karary goşundy, Presidential Decree on display at the Archive of President for life Saparmyrat Turkmenbaşy, Aşgabat.
Nations enunciated Turkmenistan’s locus within the international community over that within any Turkic or Muslim community. In 2000, the emphasis shifted to a Turkmen nationalism.
CHAPTER 6

Bilimli Nesil: Education in Nyýazow’s Golden Era, 1999-2004

Alphabet reform was an aspect of the new Turkmen country’s joining in the “world community.”

Eric Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented traditions,” which he suggests were the creation of rituals or symbolic complexes that “imply continuity with the past,” encapsulates the Turkmenification that began in the 1980s. During much of the Soviet era, Russian dominated as a lingua franca, imparting access to power by denying those who did not speak Russian access to political or social power, technical or professional fields, and higher education. The National Revival Movement (Milli Galkynys Hereketi) reversed this situation, promoting the Turkmen language at the expense of Russian, repositioning the vernacular and empowering the Turkmen language community in new ways.

Even before the onset of independence, on October 27, 1991, Turkmenistan had begun initiating political and social reforms in order to move away from Soviet-era practices. Tensions over Turkmen versus Russian language, especially in education, had persisted throughout the Soviet period. It was, therefore, understandable when post-Soviet reforms targeted language and education in tandem, locating them at the center of

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529 Azimow and Soyegow, 1998, p. 73
a program of Turkmenification entitled “The National Revival Movement” [Milli Galkynyş Hereketi].

This revitalization of Turkmen language and culture, at the expense of Russia language and Soviet values, became a point of contention among many former-Soviet peoples. Political sovereignty placed many ethnic groups in a position to assert themselves culturally. Language was one of the most prominent sites for such affirmations of national identity. However, while language and education have long been sites for social reform and political expression, President Saparmurat Nyýazow’s policies in Turkmenistan have politicized each of these social spheres to the degree that non-Turkmen ethnic groups became socially and economically marginalized. This chapter discusses policy uses of alphabet, language and literacy over five years from 1999 to 2004. During these years educational arenas turned into sites for creating a “Bilimli Nesil” or “educated generation,” reflecting a shift from nation-building, or Turkmenification, to Nyýazowization.

In 1990, when Turkmen was declared the official language of Turkmenistan, it ascended to the language of state, business, administration, education and public life, reorienting the relationship between Turkmen and Russian languages as means to social and economic power. A Turkmen national identity was asserted through language as most Russian-language spheres shifted to Turkmen language usage. Although Russian was still heard as the language of inter-ethnic communication, its public use began
decreasing dramatically even at the highest levels.\textsuperscript{531} Intellectuals and state administrators trained during the Soviet era had to reformulate their daily interactions,\textsuperscript{532} the public found itself surrounded by television, radio, and signage that reflect Turkmen cultural values, expressed in the Turkmen language, and written in the new Turkmen alphabet.\textsuperscript{533} Russian language speakers, who did not know Turkmen, found themselves outdated. Not only were the criteria for social status reversed overnight, but Russian speakers also found themselves unskilled for a labor market that was being redesigned to accommodate the emphasis on Turkmen language. In the process of illustrating social and political shifts this study highlights the issue of power, specifically, how the National Revival Movement influenced access to social and economic power within the Turkmen population.

\textit{The National Revival Movement [Milli Galkynş Hereketi]}

Turkmenistan’s National Revival Movement was President Nyýazow’s official program aimed at building a state based on a national Turkmen identity and culture. “Revival” of the national culture ranged from broad programs reintegrating Islam into daily life, such as state sponsorship of mosque building, to specific decrees requiring traditional Turkmen dress in schools; both of which became official policy after 1991, but

\textsuperscript{531} Myratgeldi Söýegow et al., \textit{Turkmen Dili} 6 (Istanbul: MEB Basımevi, 1996).
\textsuperscript{532} Hasan Kanbolat, “Garaşsz Türkmenistan,” \textit{Türk Dünyası: Dil ve edebiyat dergisi}, Sayı: 2, 1996, s.452.
have historical antecedents. The Revival Movement built on these cultural antecedents, fostering a fusion between Turkmen ethnicity, an Islamic heritage, and the secular state. The history of Turkmen tribal separation, rather than cohesion (see Introduction), is one of the driving forces behind President Nyýazow’s intense nation-building efforts.

Popular participation was crucial to the success of the National Revival Movement. Language reform requires readers, writers, and speakers. All of the symbolism related to education, parades, theater, music, dress codes, and the public accolades heaped on President Nyýazow needed a participatory audience. Yet, only certain sectors of the society participated. The population was divided by circumstance and design into Turkmen and non-Turkmen. This was not simply an ethnic question but a linguistic one. Soviets who advanced socially or economically as Russian-speaking, Soviet elite were denied status in twenty-first century Turkmenistan. This included ethnic Turkmen. A Turkmen who did not know his mother tongue is not considered a true Turkmen. Revival movement programs were implicitly designed for Turkmen consumption. That is, those “true” Turkmen, who had not lost their heritage, who had not forgotten the native language, and who had not forsaken their ancestors. Discursive policies, which implied that Post-Soviet Turkmenistan provided only enough space for the empowerment of “true” Turkmen, became a demographic reality with the exodus of

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535 Bruce Privatsky, Muslim Turkistan: Kazak religion and collective memory (Richmond, Surry, Curzon Press, 2001) discusses this issue among Kazakhs.
Russian-speaking “others,” weary of Turkmenification. The nation took shape as a Turkmen one, but the loss of specialists has left the professional core, the economy, and the society weakened.

The concepts, or myths, of “Independent, Neutral Turkmenistan” came to guide social policy. The National Revival Movement is an over-arching theme for reform that shapes social spheres such as language, education, and labor. The term Movement has very formal sound to it, and while it appears in news articles and speeches, it is not a commonly used slogan. Instead, the slogan that embodies the ideals of the discourse is “Altyn Asyr” or Golden Century. Golden Century is the metonym for all that is good about post-Soviet Turkmenistan. It appears in the names of shopping centers and hotels, in modifying descriptors of products made in Turkmenistan, and is the moniker for the generation who never knew Soviet life—Altyn Asyr Nesili. As the “termless chairman” of the National Revival Movement’s committee, Nyýazow himself has greatly influenced access to social and economic power within the Turkmen population. His singular hold on power, along with his ubiquitous portraits, statues, encouraged interpretations of his presidency as a dictatorship propped up by a cult of personality.

President Nyýazow used “discursive programs” including visual images, physical ritual, and transformation of public space that garner power to add a sense of legitimacy to his power within the new world order. President Nyýazow gained formal power, but

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his cultural policy concurrently provided the Turkmen people with opportunity and encouragement to seize long sought after political, economic, and social power. Communicated through public signage linking HALK (People) with WATAN (Nation) and TÜRKMENBAŞY (Nyýazow) the discourse implied a symbiotic relationship between the three. It also referenced the agency of Turkmen in noting their responsibility to the new nation. The state appropriated power (Watan/Turkmenbasy) while the people reclaimed a Turkmen national identity.

**Expressions of power through public texts**

Nyýazow took control of the power of public texts in post-Soviet Turkmenistan by asserting the primacy of Turkmen language. Language planners began work to create a categorically Turkmen lexicon. A section in the Turkmen Language and Literature Institute became devoted full-time to language development. They undertook one subject at a time, creating lists of new words or suggesting the revival of ancient Turkmen terms to supplant Russian and some international vocabulary. The army received new terms for everything from canteen to epaulets. Neologisms were created for the burgeoning new market of goods made in Turkmenistan. For example, a Turkmen word was designed to replace “ketchup”. Bottles of ketchup feature the word öwermeç on its labels.\(^{537}\) Rather than use the internationally recognized term that the country had employed for years, the

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\(^{537}\) The new word öwermeç derives from the verb öwermek—*to grind up*. Clement, 2004, p. 9.
Language and Literature Institute created a completely new word. Apparently, “ground up tomatoes” sounded more Turkmen. Bottled water, soda, and milk products packaged throughout the country reflect the National Revival Movement via the Turkmen names on their labels. President Nyýazow officially headed this initiative, but some scholars claimed they had supported it and had in fact suggested to Nyýazow in 1999 that it was time they begin seriously implementing the language policies they had been composing throughout the first decade of independence.\(^{538}\)

On January 1, 2000, the Language and Literature Institute began publishing a newspaper devoted solely to the language question: *Turkmen Dili [Turkmen Language]*. The newspaper, offering etymological discussions in layman’s terms aimed at the general public, was a vehicle for explaining new terms to the public. It reinforced the messages of signage that the state had used to transform public space from Soviet to Turkmen. Signs, posters and placards literally spelled-out the language reforms and brought the discourse of the National Revival Movement into the public eye.

While public texts put new phrases into context, television and radio taught pronunciation. Street-signs, state documents, and textbooks bore the “New National Turkmen Alphabet”; street names were changed from those of Soviet figures to Turkmen heroes and literary figures, while slogans devoted to “Neutral, Independent

\(^{538}\) Victoria Clement, “Secular and Religious Trends in Turkmen Education,” unpublished study for Eurasia Policy Studies Program, National Bureau of Asian Research, August 2004, p. 9. President Nyýazow’s heavy reliance on linguists to carry out the reform and write books explaining the process to the population make it difficult to determine the exact role of academics in the decision making process.
Turkmenistan” replaced Soviet slogans. The state encoded public space with officially sponsored writing to support cultural policy.

In closing the Russian-language theater (and the ballet), prohibiting the importation of Russian texts, and making Turkmen the language of instruction and administration, the state situated language at the core of the National Revival Movement. Nyýazow’s decision to require all officials to speak Turkmen led to charges of discrimination and a furthering of the “brain drain”. Yet, while minority groups and the international community criticized Nyýazow’s language policies, some ethnic Turkmen expressed some degree of satisfaction with the new pro-Turkmen language policies. This promotion of Turkmen at the expense of Russian buttressed the National Revival Movement’s Turkmenification and fostered loyalty to the state through recognition of Turkmen national culture. It not only gave Turkmen a sense of justice, after decades of Russian language dominance, it encouraged a sort of self-respect that nationalism cultivate. Villagers who were once sneered at on city busses for speaking the “provincial tongue” suddenly found themselves sought out for state positions that were previously obtainable only by the Soviet elite.

A second korenizatsiia?

Instituting a second era of korenizatsiia, President Nyýazow announced that each state sector would be responsible for ensuring their employees’ proficiency in Turkmen.


540 For works on nationalism see Ernst Gellner and Eric Hobsbawn, especially

Government Ministries offered their workers night classes in Turkmen language and schoolteachers were given language exams. Over the next few years, those illiterate in Turkmen were removed from their work. The Medical Institute, School of Law, the Military and its academies, universities and government offices transitioned to Turkmen as the language of daily communication. The Language Institute stepped up its codification of Turkmen equivalents for Russian language terms one field at a time: medical, military, education, and so on. Implementation of this policy led not simply to abstract linguistic or cultural power, but redefined access to economic power by denying work to non-Turkmen speakers.

In addition to cultural reform, a general overhaul of various labor sectors resulted in a reduction of jobs, which fell along ethno-linguistic lines. Former elites and many professionals are at risk of impoverishment as they have been removed from their jobs for lack of knowledge in Turkmen. The impact was significant among teachers. Estimates of up to 12,000 teachers, largely representative of non-Turkmen ethnic groups such as Russians, Armenians or Uzbeks, were dismissed from their positions between 1999 and 2002, ostensibly due to budgetary concerns. By 2002 the Ministry of Education completed the transition from an 11-year to a 9-year system of education. The reduction in course load was used to justify the reduction in teachers. These changes in education coincided with demands that all state employees demonstrate knowledge of Turkmen.542

Language reform is typical of nation building. However, the intensity of the Turkmen programs left non-Turkmen politically disenfranchised and economically marginalized. Western communities have found this brand of nationalism offensive, and journalists, and many scholars, have allowed the “strange[ness]” of the system to overshadow their analysis.\textsuperscript{543} However, some Turkmen saw this as justice for decades of “oppression” (their term) and they have supported a Turkmen dominated independent Turkmenistan.

This is not to say that all Turkmen found the post-Soviet system to their benefit. It became a highly politicized country where everything fell under the umbrella of Nyýazow’s National Revival Movement. Academics who wrote histories contrary to Nyýazow’s writings were fired; academic works began including quotes from the \textit{Ruhnama} to demonstrate that the author was intellectually indebted to Nyýazow; widespread use of the title “Turkmenbaşy” or ‘head of the Turkmen’ underscored Nyýazow’s supreme place in the society and emphasized the hierarchical Turkmen heritage in which ancestors are revered and authority figures are rarely questioned.

President Nyýazow himself politicized the language question by declaring in 2000 that he wanted to see “the complete and universal introduction” of the national language in public life. He underscored his seriousness by criticizing officials who speak Russian.

\textsuperscript{543} Bob Simon, 60 Minutes television program, CBS, January 4, 2004.
better than they do the national tongue in televised broadcasts and fired his foreign minister specifically for the latter's weak knowledge of Turkmen.544

The President’s popular standing and the Ruhnama

In light of a new script and intentions to build a more Turkmenified lexicon, texts, the repository of language became the focus for continuing the Revival Movement.545 There were shortages of books despite Turkey’s willingness to donate thousands of textbooks. Educators and publishers spent the 1990s trying to introduce Latin script texts in place of the Soviet materials, but the new volumes were being produced slowly.

The National Revival Movement continued to capitalize on Turkmen heritage, but the myths revealed an increasingly Nyýazow-centered orientation. Adherence to a strict line of cultural policy and celebration of Nyýazow’s Turkmenistan has diluted the Turkmen people’s role in the symbiotic relationship from vital supporters to coerced participants. 2001-2002 began to see a decline in popular support as even the “true” Turkmen began to feel that the Nyýazowization was overshadowing Turkmenification. The President’s book, Ruhnama, played a significant role in this shift.

545 Schools loan students books, which they return at the end of the year. If they lose or destroy a book they are expected to pay for it. Schools in Ashgabat had a significantly higher number of new textbooks in the new alphabet. Some schools were still using Soviet era books and teachers faced with the challenge of teaching from books written in Cyrillic while expecting the students to work in the new Latin-based alphabet. Between 1991-2002 Turkmen authors had authored 80 textbooks in the new alphabet with a total circulation of 12,160,000 copies. Report by Ministry of Education on TACIS website: www.tacism.org/tacis/index.html
The “Ruhnama” was President Nyýazow’s historical-spiritual tome, which he wrote in order to guide the Turkmenistani people in their newly found independence. It offered his interpretation of Turkmen history, his autobiography, stories of Turkmen ancestors and their important deeds, and a moral code combining Turkmen and Islamic values. For example, it encouraged children to respect elders and guides fathers in just discipline within the family. It also underscored the cults of personality Nyýazow has created around his own mother and father. The Ruhnama’s message intended to strengthen the social bases of the Turkmen community and set Nyýazow up as the leader of what he deemed to be this “golden era” in Turkmen history. Ruhnama became the official text in the National Revival Movement. Published in December 2001, Ruhnama became a part of the educational curriculum in 2002. Much public discourse surrounded it and was shaped by it, but the work did not resonate with the people as Nyýazow might have expected. State workers were required to take weekly lessons and public speeches referenced it, but most citizens quietly went along with the public recitations, ignored the ubiquitous signage referencing it, and accepted it as part of curricula. In an obvious parallel with the required political indoctrination in the Soviet period, protesting would have caused more trouble for most people than it was worth.

In 2004, primary and secondary schools generally devoted between 2-4 hours a week to Ruhnama; universities and institutes 4-8 hours a week. However, international
reports exaggerated the place of *Ruhnama* in curricula.\(^{546}\) While my report rebuffs exaggerations of the *Ruhnama*’s presence in school curricula,\(^{547}\) it also acknowledges that *Ruhnama* book has shaped the discourse of 21st century Turkmenistan. One is reminded of the long shadow cast by the *Short Course History of the CPSU* (1938), which was also ubiquitous. While the subject of much quiet and discreet ridicule, at least by intellectuals, it was also enormously influential, especially in shaping the popular culture of Stalinism.\(^{548}\)

Larger than life photos of Nyýazow had graced public buildings and city streets long before *Ruhnama* appeared. But it was with this text that Nyýazow finally pushed what had been fairly typical nation building and Turkmenification beyond what even many Turkmen found acceptable. Claiming this book to be an “inspired text” and labeling it the “sacred book”, the “lighthouse for the people”\(^{549}\) the president put into full effect the Nyýyazowization of Turkmenistan.

*Turkmenification through education: teaching the nation*

The post-Soviet reforms set in motion a decade of change in education to support broader national cultural programs that would not only reverse Russification, but would

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\(^{546}\) For an example of such exaggeration see, RFE/RL Newsline, Vol. 8, No. 79, Part I, 28 April 2004.


\(^{549}\) Signs with these phrases, “Mukkades Ruhnama” and “Halkyň Şamçyragy” and others, such as “The President’s path is our path,” are seen around the nation and most especially in the areas in and around Ashgabat.
also assert an intense strategy of Turkmenification. Initially, Russian language was not eliminated initially from the newly independent Turkmen schools, but was relegated from a language of instruction to a foreign language. While the demotion of Russian was certainly part of the overall social reorientation of Turkmenistan, it was also part of a trilingual program that made the study of English compulsory along with Turkmen and Russian. This “three language policy” (üç dillik siyýasaty) seemed far-sighted at the time, despite the slight to Russian. The study of English boomed and Turkmen citizens signed up for classes at Başkent language centers, sought out Peace Corps volunteers, and paid for private tutors in order to learn English.550 President Nyýazow encouraged the policy, declaring that knowledge of this international language would aid Turkmenistan in catching up to global standards. He even explained that one of the underlying reasons for the transition from the Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin-based one was that, “as usage of the Cyrillic alphabet had made it easier for Turkmen to learn Russian, so would a Latin script assist them in learning English, the international language of technology.”551

Yet, in 1997, even as citizens and educators pursued study of English, President Nyýazow announced that the foreign language curriculum would be seriously curtailed in public schools.552 State sponsorship of the three-language policy was being abandoned in

550 In 1997, interest in learning English was so high that complete strangers approached me at bazaars or in shared cabs to offer room and board in exchange for teaching their children English.
favor of emphasis on Turkmen.\textsuperscript{553} Foreign languages were to be taught only at specialized language schools or designated institutes of higher learning. The policy intended to focus schools more narrowly so that the students spent more time on fewer subjects and perfected their knowledge of specific topics, such as Turkmen history and mathematics. Nyýazow’s stated expectations that this narrowing of education focus would lead to better teaching and better learning was an opinion that many parents did not share.\textsuperscript{554}

Nyýazow addressed the question again in 2002 when, in a televised meeting with university rectors, he formally delineated which institutes of higher learning would and would not teach foreign languages.\textsuperscript{555} This did not eliminate the opportunity for individuals to study foreign languages. The president reminded viewers that if people wanted to learn foreign languages they could take advantage of “\textit{Dil}” or Language centers that had been established around the country by locals and international representatives. At that time the state ran twenty-one language centers around the

\textsuperscript{553} Turkmen is the language of instruction at institutes of higher education. From 2000-2005 high-schools reduced the number of classes with Russian as the language of instruction. It was impossible to obtain accurate statistics about the number of schools that continue to offer Russian language classes, even as a foreign language. It is a politically sensitive topic and a major point of contention in official Russian-Turkmen relations. Some locals say that there are no Russian schools operating whatsoever. Even the one school in Ashgabat that had been funded by the Russian embassy was in 2004 called the “Turkmen-Russian School”. Teachers working there reported that Russian is the language of instruction for some classes, such as science. Other teachers reported that many schools have split their schedule offering classes in Russian during the morning sessions and Turkmen in the afternoon. This effectively takes advantage of the split-day system, which exists largely due to an insufficient number of schools, to offer at least some Russian language courses.


\textsuperscript{555} In an April 2002 televised meeting with University and Institute Rectors, English, for example, was removed from the curriculum of the Turkmenabad (Chärjew) Pedagogical Institute and French instruction was limited to the Azady World Language Institute.
country, in addition to those offered by the Turkish company Başkent and the supplementary activities of the Peace Corps. Essentially this policy realigned the state’s responsibility in education, transferring foreign languages to the private sector, and announced Nyýazow’s intentions to organize higher learning with respect to market demands. He explained that streamlining instruction within public schools would help to prevent a surplus of unnecessary specialists, such as translators, if it was in fact, engineers that were needed. He transferred responsibility for the learning of foreign languages from the state to the individual.

In fact, in 2003 a number of elementary schools were still teaching both Russian and English as foreign languages. State publications emphasized that the long-term goal was “to perfect” the study of languages in schools. Thus, various languages, including Turkmen, Russian and English, were to be taught beginning at the pre-school level. This is a perfect example of the endless internal contradictions that confound analysts and maintain the enigmatic confusion surrounding this country. There were two diametrically opposed presidential decrees concerning languages in schools. Throughout policy history there have been instances where practice did not follow policy. In the “Golden Era” such tensions stemmed from the leadership demanding change without

556 Unclassified memo, E.O. 12958, American Embassy Ashgabat to Secretary of State Washington, DC, 07/11/03, p. 7.
557 The most recent language center event was a language “exhibition” sponsored by the Bashkent school system where students representing the various schools competed in a contest of language skills. The Turkish and Afghanistani embassies’ cultural attaches and the Bashkent schools’ director opened the festivities together. “Asgabat dil sergisi,” ZAMAN International Newspaper, May 8, 2004, pp. 1-2.
558 Clement, 2004, p. 15.
providing those responsible with the resources to carry out reforms. Contributing to the
inability of administrators to carry out orders were the President’s prediliction for firing
of ministers after only short terms in office and steady streams of changes that kept
systems such as education or medicine in a constant state of crisis—and perpetuated
corruption.\footnote{Corruption is extensive at all levels of Turkmen state administration and is no less so in education. Applicants pay $500 or more to take the admission exam. After passing such exams they must pay just to enter a particular program. In 2004, “prices” for higher education ranged in the thousands. Similar problems exist on a smaller scale at the secondary school level. Clement, 2004, p. 28.}

Persistent corruption related to various grabs at forms of power. State employees
took chances to win personal gain. Nyýzow then frequently took the opportunity to draw
the public’s attention to the corrupt behavior, remove the individual from his or her post,
and characterize himself as the people’s advocate. For example, at an April 2004 cabinet
meeting, Nyýazow announced the removal of the education minister, the two deputy
ministers, and the deputy head of the education department of the city of Ashgabat on the
corruption. According to the president, every one of the capital's kindergartens had added
"dead souls" to the number of employees for whom it drew salaries. The administrators
allegedly pocketed this money even as they continued to assert that they did not have
enough money to pay a living wage to their actual employees.

\textit{Tensions in education}

In addition to the complications created by the change to Turkmen as the primary
language of instruction and the great number of state employees who lost jobs due to lack

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of ability in Turkmen, ethnic issues have played a role. While some teachers were fired ostensibly because they do not know Turkmen, most of these claimed that they were fired simply for not being ethnic Turkmen. There was never an official policy targeting non-Turkmen. The language policy, and later the budget, were the justifications for personnel changes. One former Ministry of Education administrator reported that they had offered teachers courses in Turkmen after school hours free of charge. Several teachers confirmed this, although several others complained that they were never offered such opportunities. In any case, these same teachers felt sure that even if they had learned Turkmen it wouldn’t have mattered because the heart of the issue was ethnicity, not linguistics. A source from the Turkmen Education Ministry reported to U.S. Embassy representatives that, “under the terms of an unwritten order ‘handed to us from above’, universities have been encouraged to reject applicants with non-Turkmen surnames, especially ethnic Russian.”

Beyond any language or alphabet symbolism lie the daily material concerns of educators. As late as 2004 there were extraordinary crises in payments not only to teachers but also to other government employees. Some regions were as much as six months behind in receiving their salaries. A general fatigue and frustration developed

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561 Unclassified memo, E.O. 12958, American Embassy Ashgabat to Secretary of State Washington, DC, 07/11/03, p. 6.
562 In 2003, educators were entitled to the $100 per month salary of state employees. However, teachers fell into a special category of being paid by the class. In 2002 President Nyýazow raised state salaries from $50 per month to $100, but among the teachers work also doubled. In the press and on television, President Nyýazow accused the local bureaucrats of corruption on television, promised to restore the salaries and
among educators. They felt unappreciated and under-paid by the state. Too many classroom hours compounded the perceived lack of opportunity for self-improvement or paid preparation.\textsuperscript{563}

Ethnic tensions troubled education as well. In 1999 there were 1589 Turkmen, 99 Uzbek (in Dashoguz and Lebap), 55 Russian (mainly Ashgabat and Mary), 49 Kazakh, and 138 mixed language schools throughout Turkmenistan.\textsuperscript{564} In 2003/2004 international news reports of all non-Turkmen schools closing created confusion over the status of Kazakh, Uzbek and Russian language schools. However, most of these schools did not close down, but reformed under the guidelines of the National Revival Movement. The schools were Turkmenified: the language of instruction changed to Turkmen and other languages fell into unofficially use. One teacher explained that these schools were still needed to serve the community, but with a wry tone noted “this is Turkmenistan, one should know Turkmen.”\textsuperscript{565}

\textit{The International Community’s contributions to Turkmen Education}

Many Turkmen fear that if access to higher education remains restricted to such a small percentage of the population the country will lose generations of knowledge. There

\textsuperscript{563} Before the raise teachers worked an average of 18 per week. After the increase, their work increased to 30 hours per week. Educators were required to work 35 weeks a year, but this increase brought them over 40. Clement, 2004, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{564} Turkmenistan News Weekly, 12 April 1999.

\textsuperscript{565} Clement, 2004, p. 44.
is even greater distress over the quality of education in Turkmenistan, especially the perceived threat of ideology to general knowledge. Parents were troubled over the presence of national culture in curricula and the reduction of schooling to nine years. An increasing number of families send their children abroad for education, at their own expense. Since these concerns are recognized and shared by foreign embassies, several governments have made education a priority in their relations with Turkmenistan. The case of Turkish influence and aid in Central Asia has been so extensive that it must be attended to individually.

The role of Turkey

Turkmenistan’s endeavors to revamp its educational system were accompanied by extensive support and funding from the Turkish government, which in the early 1990s was eager to act as the “big brother” or model for the newly independent Turkic states of the former Soviet Union. The US and other western powers favored this “Turkish Model” in the former-USSR, especially considering the proximity of potential Iranian influences. Then president Turgut Özal visited Central Asia and later Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz made several public statements stating Turkey’s readiness to provide social and economic support to their cultural brethren. This came in the form of scholarships for Central Asian students to study in Turkey, the printing and publishing of

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567 M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish Identity Politics and Central Asia,” in Sagdeev and Eisenhower, 2000,
thousands of books in the new alphabet, funding for a Turkish section in the Turkmenistan State Library, and the establishment of two schools in Ashgabat.\textsuperscript{568}

The Turkish Government established several institutes in Turkmenistan, including in 1993, one primary school, İlk Öğretim Okulu and a high-school, the Anadolu Lisesi; a Turkish Language Center (TÖMER);\textsuperscript{569} and a Vocational Training Center (YAMEN) in 1996.\textsuperscript{570} This training center began offering courses in plumbing, electronics, weaving/embroidery, sewing, and textiles. Students receiving a certificate at the end of their study possessed “practical, marketable skills.” The Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) oversaw many similar undertakings, such as the opening of Turkish cultural centers’ student and teacher exchange programs; academic conferences; providing scholarships for university students; the opening of the Turkish language schools (TÖMER); training of banks and management personnel; broadcasting to Eurasia; training for public administrators and bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{571}

\textsuperscript{568} Türk Cumhuriyet Bakanlıgı ve Türkmenistan arasında Eğitim İş Protokol, 1992; mildly revised by a 1996 protocol, but the intentions were the same.
\textsuperscript{569} Between 1993 and 2003, 1,847 certificates had been awarded. There are currently 249 students and 5 teachers. In 2003 3-month long courses cost 300,000 manats ($13) Clement, 2004, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{570} In 2003 a total of 1760 graduates had received certificates. In 2004, there were 259 students. All of these institutes are in Ashgabat. A 4-month program cost 200,000 manats (under $10). Ibid.
Turkish Influence and Islamic education

While independence allowed for a surge in religious practice, Turkmen did not return to their pre-modern traditional Islamic school systems. The Russian term “shkola” began to fade from public use as mekteb, borrowed from Arabic centuries earlier, came to dominate in discourse. Yet, this did not signal a mass shift toward Islamic based education. Individuals did establish schools and private classes, and mollas and Islamic scholars (alyms, iṣans) began teaching Arabic and the Koran in mosques, in private lessons and in their homes. Still, the thirst for spiritual growth and general education did not overlap explicitly. Appreciative of the modern—secular—educational system most Turkmen parents were content to maintain the separation between public education and Islam.

However, Turkmen did allow for an overlap when they perceived that education infused with spiritual sentiment would provide their children with better opportunities. Separate from the Turkish government, the private Turkish foundation Başkent established English language classes for adults at a nominal fee, opened a university in 1993, and began to build primary and secondary schools around the country. The Başkent foundation is tied to the Fethullah Gülen system of schools.

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573 For a general overview of education and language planning as social factors, see Robert Cooper, *Language planning and social change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

574 For the best available study in English see *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003).
Başkent was successful in Turkmenistan in that the numbers of schools and students have grown consistently. The local population recognizes these schools as offering the best alternative form of education in Turkmenistan. Every year three- to six-hundred students take the entrance examination at each of the secondary schools, although there is space for only fifty- to two-hundred depending on the size of the school.\footnote{Clement, 2004.} Başkent established one university in Aşgabat (The International Turkmen-Turk University) and fourteen primary and secondary schools around the country.\footnote{I taught at this university in 1997 and visited most of the high-schools in spring 2004.}

While these schools were successful in formal education, it is more difficult to determine the extent of their spiritual influence. The Turkmen people accepted the Turkish education institutions and continue to view them as the best domestic educational opportunity. Parents respected the “Turkish schools,” as they are called, for providing a broad curriculum with high standards, they appreciated the technical advantages of these well-funded schools, and they respected the level of discipline extolled. However, parents did not send their children to these schools in search of Islamic enlightenment.\footnote{Private discussions with parents with varied economic situations between 1997-2004.} As they had since encountering modernity more than a century earlier, Turkmen parents saw education as a means of self-enrichment, not spiritual development.\footnote{For a English language study of the Soviet school system in Central Asia, see William Medlin, et al. eds., \textit{Education and Development in Central Asia: A case study on social change in Uzbekistan} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971). Also, Larry E. Holmes, 1991.} They expected independent Turkmenistan’s schools to impart knowledge that will allow
citizens to function in society. (The divergence of public from state opinion is the topic of chapter 6).

Separate from the Turkish government, a private Turkish foundation began operating in Turkmenistan under the name Başkent. This network established English and Turkish language classes for adults at a nominal fee, opened a university in 1993/4, and began to build primary and secondary schools around the country. The Başkent system was tied indirectly to the Fethullah Gülen system of schools.

Approximately three hundred schools made up a loosely connected system in Turkey, the Central Asian states, and several other countries where teachers, administrators and sponsors promote the philosophies of Fethullah Gülen. Fethullah Gülen, a cleric from Izmir, Turkey, brought together members of the religious, educational, business community to establish centers of learning based on the teachings of Said Nursi (1873-1960). Adherents of the Nursi philosophy believed that through education it is possible to teach students how to live a life deeply rooted both in Islam and in the modern scientific world. The aim of the Gülen schools was not to teach religion per se, but to serve spiritual needs by stressing Islamic values and ethics (ahlak), which were seen as “unifying factors between different religious, ethnic, and

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580 For the best available study in English see Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003).
political orientations." The underlying methodology was for the teachers to embody spiritual ideals and impart them through model living. Baškent was arguably successful in Turkmenistan in that the numbers of schools and students grew consistently and the local population came to recognize these schools as offering a good alternative form of education in Turkmenistan. Every year 300 to 600 students took the entrance examination at each of the secondary schools, although each admitted only 50-200. While these schools were successful in education, the extent of their spiritual influence was difficult to measure. The Turkmen people accepted the Turkish education institutions and continued to view them as a good domestic educational opportunity. Parents respected the Turkish schools for providing a broad curriculum with respectively higher standards, they appreciated the technical advantages of these well-funded schools, and they respect the level of discipline extolled. However, most parents did not send their children to these schools in search of Islamic enlightenment.

Two years public service to qualify for higher learning

Experiential study was a part of the Turkmen education system during the Soviet period. But while in 1991 classroom study comprised 73% of the curriculum and practice 27%, by 2002 classroom study was reduced to 38% while practical study

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increased to 62%.

On 4 July 2003 the Cabinet of Ministers announced that in order to gain practical experience through internship, students must work for two years in a selected area of study before they apply for admission to institutes of higher learning. At various stages there were to be examinations in the areas of study as well as Turkmen state history and ideology. Thus, at the age of 15 or 16, children who wished to pursue higher education are expected to find an internship or paid position in a country where unemployment that is estimated to be between 30-50%. Locals dubbed this the “two-plus-two program,” referring to the fact that the two years of internship leave students of four-year programs with only two years of classroom learning.

When the Ministry of Education announced that admission to universities and institutes would be based on an applicant’s practical experience, urbanites lined up at state administration offices while rural youth sought work in areas concerning wheat and cotton with the hopes of entering the Agricultural University. Those hoping to enter the Medical Institute sought positions cleaning floors in hospitals. Some argued that there is a certain logic to this program and it could, in theory, be beneficial both to a country and to students individually. However, it was put into motion without much preparation and is being poorly managed. As with the “two-plus-two” program, students are not gaining the knowledge the concept intended. Cleaning floors and filing papers did not prepare a student to pass a test related to the practice of medicine or law. Yet these were

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585 Unclassified memo, E.O. 12958, American Embassy Ashgabat to Secretary of State Washington, DC, 07/11/03, p. 2.
586 There are some exceptions, such as Architecture, which are five-year programs.
587 Clement, 2004, p. 32.
the jobs available to the inexperienced. Moreover, the general conditions around the
country hampered the feasibility of even marginal success when 30%-50%
unemployment was keeping qualified individuals from obtaining work.

Some citizens went so far as to label it free labor as the students are expected to
spend their two years practicum within the department or ministry they will serve upon
graduation. An example of this is the students who are assigned to the banks. They are
supposed to be experiencing an internship that engages them in daily bank activities and
teaches managerial skills. However, many report that they are assigned simple tasks such
as filing or running errands. They complain that they get little guidance or mentoring.588
A fundamental problem with the program is that administrators of banks, hospitals,
schools and businesses themselves have been provided with little guidance as to how to
mentor these young people. The students receive their stipends from the government,
and criteria for the program are met on paper, but in reality it suffers from weakness in
implementation.589

Educators were generally unhappy with this concept, but they had little
opportunity to speak out or affect policy change. Still, some educators quietly rebelled
by re-organizing their programs so that the students received closer to three years of

588 Clement, 2004, p. 32.
589 The Turkish government had great success in establishing educational programs in Turkmenistan. Like
the successful activities of other governments listed above, these endeavors offered examples of methods
for the international community to become involved with the Turkmen community. Focus on education or
training that coincided with the Turkmen government’s stipulations can offer opportunities to the young
people who are in that two-year void between high-school and eligibility for university.
classroom study.\textsuperscript{590} Since students were required to attend short seminars or classes every three months during the two-years of work, some teachers intensified and lengthened the duration of these meetings, giving them more time with the students.

The decree requiring two-years of practical experience for admission to higher education took the country by surprise. Ironically, because the number of applicants dropped dramatically so the did the amount of the bribes.\textsuperscript{591} The government addressed corruption unevenly. That is, President Nyýazow habitually called officials and administrators before him in televised meetings and berated those who have been found guilty before dismissing them from their positions. Summaries regularly appeared in newspapers the following day. In this way, Nyýazow seemed to be taking advantage of the situation, presenting himself to the public as the singular official who was looking out for the people’s best interests as he worked tirelessly to keep dishonest individuals out of the government. Several cases of false information on work experience, or forged experience documents, led to such a presidential display. Several school directors and education department officials were sacked for providing false labor documents indicating two-years work experience to high-school graduates.\textsuperscript{592}

\textsuperscript{590} Clement, 2004, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{591} Clement, 2004, p. 45.
Quotas

In spring 2002, President Nyýazow explained in a television broadcast that he was reforming higher education so as to keep admission and graduation rates in-line with market trends. He explained that he wanted to avoid a glut of interpreters, for example, if it was in fact agriculturalists that were needed. Thus, quotas for university admittance were altered. The numbers indicated an increase from the previous year, but in actuality represented a decrease of nearly five times from the years before independence. The percentage of students enrolled in various fields at all higher education institutions breaks down as follows, in 1991 and 2002 respectively: Medicine 7%, 12%; Sport and Tourism 5%, 4%; Education 41%, 31%; Agriculture 17%, 9%; Culture and Arts 2%, 5%; Public Administration 1%, 3%; Economics 13%, 12%; Oil and Gas 6%, 7%; Energy 1%, 3%; Construction 4%, 1%; Transportation & Communication 0%, 6%; Other 3%, 7%. In 2003 there were approximately 15,000 students attending universities and 3,930 more were expected to enter their first year of study. State quotas make allowances for less than 10% of high-school graduates to attend Universities or Institutes. Slots open at the various institutes, based on estimated market demands by the government.

593 Unclassified memo, E.O. 12958, American Embassy Ashgabat to Secretary of State Washington, DC, 07/11/03, p. 3.
594 Magtumguly State University 500; Azady Institute of world languages 170; Seidi State Pedagogical Institute 160; Agricultural Institute 350; Polytechnic Institute 500 (an increase of 150 from previous year); Institute of National Economy 250; Institute of Transport and Communication 230 (increase of 50); Institute of Sport and Tourism 80; Medical University 280; Institute of Culture 60; National Conservatory 75; Arts Academy 45; Institute of Energy 180; Turkmen-Turkish University 350 (increase of 150); Military Institute 550; Police Academy 150.
Vocational training

Almost in direct response to these questions concerning practical training and his vision for the country, last winter the president made clear that he wants schools to emphasize vocational training. In December 2003, in a televised meeting with students and art workers, President Nyýazow, told the audience that higher schools should abandon what he deemed to be "useless" lessons and instead concentrate on training skilled specialists. He also admitted that there is lack of financing in the education sphere and promised to provide $100,000 in assistance. While the president made clear that he does not intend the state to fund studies that are covered by the private sector, he also indicated that he was willing to increase state expenditure on vocational study. Although predictions of catastrophic failure of the Turkmen educational system stem from internet and journalistic sources, these derived from the western-liberal perspective that prioritizes mass education, universal literacy, and critical thinking. These were not the goals of the National Revival Movement. Education Programs for 2010 and 2020 indicated that the government intended to emphasize vocational training. Academics who participated in the conceptualization and design of the long-

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595 Based on the classes that have been eliminated, art, physical education and foreign languages that do not relate directly to the broader (technical) curriculum seem to be what he was referring to.
596 Turkmenistan Project Open Society Institute, Weekly News Brief on Turkmenistan, December 12-18, 2003, p. 9, citing excerpts from Turkmen TV first channel, Asgabat, in Turkmen 1600 gmt 11 Dec 03.
598 In 2004 there were 116 vocational schools in Turkmenistan, 11 of which were in Asghabat, 19 in Ahal wilayety, 12 in Balkan wilayety, 20 in Dashoguz wilayety, 24 in Mary wilayety, and 30 in Lebap wilayety.
term program explained that it is one of many paths that could have been taken, and while they are aware of the deficiencies, they also recognized a certain logic for a young country that needs to meet basic infrastructural needs.\textsuperscript{599}

In 1997, the state placed vocational schools under the authority of related Ministries, administrative offices, and \textit{Häkimliks} (Governors or authorities in the five \textit{wilayets} and the city of Ashgabat)\textsuperscript{600} so that they could prepare workers in specific trades as necessary.\textsuperscript{601} For example, the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would respectively decide how many students should be enrolled in courses in farming versus animal husbandry, or International Affairs versus German language study. The schools were also linked to various factories and places of work that fall under the auspices of state administration. This would have allowed each sector to supply workers for itself. For example, the “State Cotton Concern” prepares students for the cotton industry at one school in Kaka district and three in Galkynyş district. These schools provided “trained” employees to the state cotton factory.\textsuperscript{602}

\footnotesize{In 2003, 51,437 students were enrolled in them. This was an increase from 21,746 in 1998. These schools offered six to eight month long courses and operate solely on tuition with no government subsidies. There were also fifteen professional colleges in Turkmenistan; thirteen were government funded and two privately funded from tuition and fees and sponsors. Government funded schools consisted of three pedagogical schools (in Ashgabat, Dashoguz, and Mary), five medical schools (Ashgabat, Turkmenbasy, Dashoguz, Turkmenabat and Mary), and five music/art schools (Ashgabat, Dashoguz, Mary, Lebap wilayet). \textit{Turkmenbashy’s Golden Education System}, 2003, p. 61-77. The tuition-based schools focus on management and banking. In 2003 there were nearly 4,000 students enrolled in the latter. Unclassified memo, E.O. 12958, American Embassy Ashgabat to Secretary of State Washington, DC, 07/11/03, pp. 7-8.\textsuperscript{599} Clement, 2004, p. 35.\textsuperscript{600} 3 in Ashgabat, 6 in Ahal wilayet, 9 in Dashoguz wilayet, 11 in Lepab wilayet, 7 in Mary wilayet. No information is given regarding Balkan wilayet. \textit{Turkmenbashy’s Golden Education System}, 2003, p. 58.\textsuperscript{601} \textit{Turkmenbashy’s Golden Education System}, 2003, p. 58-70.\textsuperscript{602} \textit{Turkmenbashy’s Golden Education System}, 2003, p. 59.}
Training of specialists…will be implemented to meet the requirements of the national economy sectors. The plan intends to ensure conformity of school and higher education with international standards, to improve the quality of the professional training at schools, and to reduce the number of unemployed youth in the labor market. Particular attention will be paid to the creation of the network of educational institutions to train specialists of at high-school level. These institutions may be state-owned or private ones. About 30.6 thousand students will get special professional training and higher education free of charge, while privately paid education will be provided to 53,000 in 2005. In 2010 these figures [are expected to] account for 42,200 and 28,500 respectively.603

Vocational and technical study has been broadly defined to include internet training, language instruction, cultural events, and preventative healthcare. Nevertheless, as of spring 2003, the greatest problem with this scheme to develop technical studies was that there simply were not enough technical or vocational schools to meet the population’s needs for the near future.604 An extension of vocational/technical training has been formalized as part of Turkmen citizen’s military training.605 So that they may learn a skill during this period of service, President Nyýazow decreed in 2002 that they should engage in practical training.606 It was with this decree that hundreds of policemen, nurses, and laborers lost their positions. The state explained that these fields had been burdened with a glut of unnecessary positions created during the Soviet era. Nyýazow intended to reduce the demands on the national budget by cutting down on numbers and

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603 2010 Maksatnamasy, p. 19
604 In 2003, 4,774 people applied to 13 professional schools; 4.2 applicants per slot. 362 (6.8%) had two years work experience; 2,380 (49.8) were 2003 high-school graduates; 27.1% were male; 72.9% were female; 94.5% were native Turkmen. 1,140 were admitted, 115 with more than two years work experience; 553 are new high-school graduates; 313 male and 827 female; 1086 Turkmen and 54 non-Turkmen.
605 “Labour Army’ In the Alarming Time of the News,” www.turkmenistan.ru
placing military recruits into some of the remaining positions. Today army conscripts act as traffic police, man construction projects, and farm on state lands. While the state regards this as an opportunity for practical learning, the populace and the international community regards it as free labor. It is not a popular program among the Turkmen people.  

**Conclusion**

This study offers excerpts of Turkmen history as examples of the role of culture in larger social experiences. As in the other eras discussed in earlier chapters, themes repeat: the power of language; the importance of history in nation building programs, or in this case, the National Revival Movement; and the use of culture to garner political power.

President Nyýazow capitalized on the importance of language in the Turkmen heritage. In addition to maintaining his leadership position since the late Soviet period, Nyýazow has suggested cultural reforms that implicitly reference the past and have encouraged academic debate that relies on historical experience, in order to cultivate his position in the new nation. Western depictions of his rule as “filling a [leadership] void” or of the society as “at a complete loss of direction,” ignored the historical record and the degree to which have Turkmen maintained their traditional culture, even

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607 Clement, 2004, p. 34.
609 Tracz, p. 1.
during the Soviet period. Not only did the Turkmen language undergo lexical and alphabetic reform, the National Revival Movement promoted the Turkmen language at the expense of Russian, repositioning the vernacular and empowering the Turkmen language community in new ways. During much of the Soviet era, Russian dominated as a lingua franca, imparting access to power by denying those who did not speak Russian access to political or social power, technical or professional fields, and higher education. The National Revival Movement reversed this situation.
CONCLUSION

The stories of alphabet reform illustrate that communities reveal themselves not only in the substance of what they write, but in the methods they use to write it. The depiction of language is as important as the language itself. As a carrier of culture, script communicates an aspect of the identity a group wishes to affirm. It can embody one or multiple loci of enunciation. For this reason we can look to script and language history to trace the evolution of and manifestation of a society’s self-identification. If each locus of enunciation is a crossroad of cultural membership or historical experience (such as coloniality) then Turkmen alphabets signify the Turkmen expression of this intersection.

The literacy narrative found within this Turkmen history is a sub-set of the larger narratives of modernization and enlightenment. The spread of literacy is not the same as the development of language; although the two do often overlap. Efforts to spread mass literacy often reflect a desire to change society through access to the written word. The history of language development reveals a persistent belief in the ability of the spoken word to reflect the spoken language. Turkmen language history illustrates multiple attempts to reform the writing system so that it would better represent the vernacular. Alphabets are collections of signs with no inherent qualities. Yet, decisions about script change and alphabet reform are fraught with meaning that reflect ideological considerations. While “the apparent neutrality of literacy practices disguises their
significance for the distribution of power in society and for authority relations," arguments over script frequently resort to linguistic positions that perpetuate the alphabet myth.

While literacy does not necessarily stimulate modernization, a standardized, codified, written language is a basic element of modern societies. This importance doubtless lends itself to the belief that literacy could usher a society into modernity. While part of the experience of modernity, the concept of “literacy” differs over time and space. The spread of universal literacy and mass education mark the modern experience in ways that set “modernity” apart from earlier periods. Yet the enduring value placed on literacy and schooling certainly stems from pre-modern experiences. Rooted in the 18th century Enlightenment, with a heritage reaching back beyond the 16th century Reformation (Renaissance), expectations of literacy as a means of cultural reproduction bring language, culture, power and education into contact. This study of

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610 Street, 1992, p. 2.
611 See Eric Hobsbawm’s The Age of Empire, pp. 25,148-9, 156-7, puts into a big picture context how the shaping of a global economy and administration became increasingly reliant on written documents, the spread of mass literacy, and trends in reform of educational systems. The symbolic power of language and education are also discussed by Ernst Renan, Immanuel Kant, Pierre Bourdieu, Frantz Fannon, Michael Coe, Kwame Appiah, Partha Chaterjee and Rolena Adorno.
612 Jack Goody and Ian Watt argue, 1968, p. 55, that “alphabetic reading and writing were important in the development of political democracy…” However, this refers only to the Hellenic world and is not demonstrated universally. Widespread literacy assists in modernizing a society, but does not necessarily lead to specific types of political composition. “Widespread literacy may be necessary for large scale representative democracy to function easily, but it certainly does necessarily produce democracy.” Kathleen Gough, “Literacy in Traditional China and India,” in Jack Goody, ed. Literacy in Traditional Societies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, ), p. 83.
literacy growth among Turkmen examines how cultural context defines access to and application of knowledge, specifically reading and writing.
APPENDIX A

Title page from the journal *Türkmen Ili*—in Arabic and Cyrillic scripts.
When the Soviet Turks transitioned to a Latin-based script, a different alphabet was designed for each group. In order to promote Turkic alphabet unity, the Central Turkic Alphabet Committee, founded in Baku in 1926, undertook creating a single alphabet for all Soviet Turks. The above shown "Unified Turkic Alphabet" was prepared in 1927. From Şimşir, 1991, p. 41.
APPENDIX C

Title page from the journal of the Turkmen Cultural Institute: *Turkmenovedenie*
### APPENDIX D

II. Харпкыл бөлүмү

#### ТУРКМЕН ЭЛИПБИЙИ

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The 1993 Latin-based Turkmen alphabet shown as printed, handwritten, pronunciation. Taken from Myradgeldi Söyegow and Nyazberdi Rejebow, Täze Türkmen Elipbiyi (Așgabat: Ruh, 1995), p. 34.
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A note on transliteration: I have transliterated Turkmen words and names according to the spelling current in Turkmenistan in 2005, despite the alphabet in which they originally appeared. Most works dated prior to 1926, and some to 1928, were written in the Arabic script. Turkmen from 1926/28-1939/40 was written in a Latin script. From 1939/40 to the 1990s the language used a Cyrillic alphabet. If a Turkmen name appeared in Russian or with the Russian spelling, I represent that with the Library of Congress system for Cyrillic.