

of South Carolina) in a paper on Taiwanese literature (Zhu Tianxin's novella *Old Capital*) examines the effect of nostalgia caused by, as she says, "the erasure of Chineseness, culturally, politically, and historically, from the construction of indigenous Taiwanese identity." Junjie Luo introducing an exiting contemporary Chinese author Yu Hua read into catastrophe as literary device, symbol and human condition in Yu Hua's famous novel *To Live*. He also succeeded to show how such contrasting aesthetics as a Chinese tale and an American comic can converge in new art.

The Kyrgyz literature was represented at the forum by the rediscovered writings and philosophy of Kubatbek Djusubaliev, thanks to the efforts of his family, particularly, his daughter Jamby Djusubalieva. A forbidden author under the rule of the Soviet Empire, he saw his novels published for the first time in the 1990's. He lives in the mountains of Alai, a reclusive thinker; his friends call him "dervish" ("a walking man"). In the *Seven Words and Confucius*, a collection of essays, poems and early novellas published part in Kyrgyz, part in the Russian language (poems) we find an expression of his ideas on the destiny of man, spiritual situation of the contemporary world and the cultural legacy of his native Central Asian state – Kyrgyzstan.

He expresses a sharp intellectual picture of a contradictory world breaking up with the tradition, language and customs of the ancestors. The fear of the disappearing Word, distorted Logos, had forced him to stick devotedly to the local (Alai) Kyrgyz dialect – a symbol of roots and home, though his choice cut off a majority of readers not familiar with the language of his writings in his own land. Stylistically, he inherited complexity of expression inherent in Western intellectual tradition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novels *My Love Flies to You as a Bird*, *The Sun Didn't Finish His Self-Portrait* and others represent poetic, comic, nostalgic canvass, deeply human in all its overtones, the reflection of a lonely artist. In meditations of the *Lonely Notes*, he is facing the social signs of the "end of the Human" with a stoic acceptance of life and a vision of everlasting spiritual heights of the Ancient Oriental philosophy and the Bible that can give answers to the contemporary human situation.

The revival of his novels, due to the spirit of time, is a challenging fact that allows us to recognize Kyrgyz literature not as some "post-colonial" or other equivalent of a global *trend*, but as a unique historic archetype of their people and the mystery of their beliefs and their language.

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## *The World According to Kubatbek*

Virtually unknown to a greater literary world, the name of **Kubatbek Djusubaliev** has much to say to his Kyrgyz contemporaries. A forbidden author under the rule of the Soviet

Empire, he saw his novels published for the first time in the 1990's. It is a quite uneasy and tedious task to present the personality and *oeuvres* of your own father, taking in account his specific artistic destiny. I would like to present his creative works through some facts of his biography that influenced greatly his oeuvre.

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Kubatbek Djusubaliev was born on October 30, 1941 to the family of a teacher in a remote village of Pamir-Alai region of Kyrgyzstan (former republic of the USSR). Kubatbek's father got back home sick from the combat of the Second World War, and died from tuberculosis on the third day after his child was born. Kubat was brought up by his grandmother, a strong and willing woman skilled in crafts: she was a carpet weaver, and went blind when Kubat was still a child. Later, memories of childhood and a strong personality of his grandmother influenced and inspired his literary work. When he turned 16 years old, the old granny sent him to the city to study. "Your father was an educated man, so you also should go to the city and become an educated person," she said to him. Together with his friend he decided to go to the capital city of Frunze to enter the History Faculty at the State University, at that time considered to be a prestigious humanitarian education. Suddenly he changed his mind and applied for the Department of Journalism at the Philological Faculty at the Kyrgyz State University. As he tried to explain later in one of his interviews, "as if it was an unknown overpowering force that drove me to change my previous plans and to enter journalism. Probably, my childhood dream to become a writer had directed me then..."

Despite the fact that Kubat Djusubaliev didn't know the Russian language, the Examination Board had decided to enroll him to the Department of Journalism, due to the policy of educational support to the young people from the far-remote areas. The young writer plunges into the world of literature in Russian, treasures of the Russian and world classics (A. Chekhov, F. Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, W. Faulkner, J. Joyce, A. Camus, F. Kafka etc.), as well as the mainstream of the so-called "socialist realism".

As a student Kubat Djusubaliev wrote his first novel *Spring Comes Early to the Mountains*, which received positive critical response after being published in the *Ala-Too* literary magazine.

After graduating from the university, Kubat Djusubaliev was assigned as a teacher to work at the secondary school in the far remote region of Alai, where he had spent two years. In 1962 he wrote his first novel *The Sun's Unfinished Self-Portrait*, which was published in 1964 in the *Ala-Too* literary magazine. The novel brings an outstanding success to the author. It tells about residents of a remote mountain village in the post-war years: an old blind granny and a village "madman" a man who lost his mind in the warfare. Actually, this man is the boy's father, but everybody in the village, including grandmother, withholds the secret from the boy, while he is suffering from a loss of his father and frustration associated with that. He covertly sees the madman and brings him food. When the man (his father) and, later, his grandmother die, the boy stays absolutely alone, and finally learns about the secret parenthood.

The novel was written as reminiscence, full of dialogue and humor, in vibrant and vivid language, using the Southern dialect – colloquial language of the Alai people. The abrupt and laconic language of this book, the very style of it was unique and didn't occur any more in his later writings. As the author confessed later: "At school I used to read a lot of printed trash ("makulatura") of the Soviet thick novels, and I felt disgust and total non-acceptance of

that style...One night at the university, when everybody went for the New Year party, I stayed alone reading through the night a book that my friend borrowed me for a short time. Those were the *Screenplays of the American Cinema*. And it came to my mind: it is possible to write in this style! That's how I did my first novel – by short, abrupt “staccato” phrases, without any explanations. Though later, in other novels, I never repeated it.”

The novel had a phenomenal success: firstly, it was written in a bold truthful manner, without any socialist decor, that everyone got used to in Soviet Kyrgyzstan; secondly, the style had nothing in common with “socialist realism”; and, thirdly, his innovative language, the usage of the Southern Alai dialect challenged the official language and was in itself a new and brave literary act. But the most important thing about the novel was its problematic that the author had formulated at the very beginning of his writing career and continued to follow and develop in the course of his literary path – that is of a man, his humanity, recapturing of his innermost experience and reflections on it. Alongside with the success, the novel brings him a misfortune: suddenly every venue was closed on his way, for different reasons his works were banned from publishing, and his name was forbidden from mentioning in press. Some official critics blamed him for the absence of the “*realistic view of society*” and the “*detrimental influence of the Western literature.*”

During the two years of teaching in the Chon-Alai region (the alpine Pamir of the Osh province in Kyrgyzstan) he received a proposition to enter the Advanced Screenwriting Courses in Moscow (Высшие Сценарные Курсы). At that time it was one of the best workshops for the young creative writers. Kubat Djusubaliev had passed his exams successfully and entered the school in January 1965. The class that he entered turned out to be the “constellation” of literary talents: Andrei Bitov, Vladimir Makanin, Grant Matevosyan, David Markish, Rustam Ibragimbekov, Ignat German, Reso Gabriadze, and others. All of them became well-known authors, screenwriters; all made a great contribution into the development of their national literatures, cinema and culture in general.

It is interesting to mention an episode that happened when Kubat Djusubaliev was passing an exam for the Screenwriters' Courses, which he recollects in one of his interviews. The students had to write a story using one of the two suggested themes: “heroic deed” or “enemy”. Everybody else dashed off and left, while Kubatbek, all alone, after long effort, as he practically didn't know the Russian language, finally managed to complete the work and left the room. “I felt so ashamed, I was sweating heavily from embarrassment.” He recollects the episode, “But still I had done it!” The title of the story was *The Old Enemies*. The story had a simple plot:

“On a sinuous Pamir road a little herdsman is grazing a flock of sheep. There is nobody around; the boy is urinating...when suddenly there is a sound of a truck horn. He is not paying any attention, unhurried, playfully continues his act, ignoring the loud horn and driver's irritation. While the truck, the old “*polutorka*”, is carrying a tomb stone to the cemetery... The story finishes with the words: “on the mountain road the two old enemies met each other – Life and Death.” He received the “five”, the highest grade, for his story.

After coming back to Kyrgyzstan, Kubatbek Djusubaliev takes up to his next work – a novel with a plot that he had long been thinking of doing under the title of ***Muzdak Dubaldar (Cold Walls)***. His major theme developed in his early works (*Spring Comes Early to The Mountains, The Sun's Unfinished Self-Portrait*) gets a clearer and deeper outline in this novel.

The plot is seemingly plain: the protagonist's father dies under unknown circumstances. It

happens during the father's visit to his son living in the city in a high-rise apartment building; he falls off the balcony. Now the son has to take his father's body back to his village to bury him there. On his way many things are happening; various unpredicted trials and circumstances delay the journey: quarantine on the roads, police raids, and other. This sad episode of the real life is intermixed with memories and recapturing of the past. The hero remembers his childhood, his father, and his grandmother. He feels a thirst for father's love: his own father was a very cruel man. The author alludes to the nondescript motive that the father's death could have been "incriminated" by his son's covert wish. Though the hero seems to be quite good, pure, and fragile human being, he consistently collides with cruelty and indifference of the surrounding world, as if trying to break the inscrutable closed walls. He suffers from his solitude more intensely; the feeling that the closed cold walls grow between people, does not leave him, along with the broad tragic sense of the world. At the same time, the hero's inner strivings are towards the light, love, and richness of life; when he sees misunderstanding, alienation, and disharmony in human relationships, he feels tortured himself and longs for love, compassion and harmony.

Despite the tragic leading theme, the novel is full of cheerful overtones, humor and is written in colloquial folk patois, totally in the Southern Kyrgyz dialect, all sparkling with live scenes and dialogue. Unlike the accepted literary Kyrgyz language, formulated during the Soviet era, the native Southern lively language of this novel is the author's innovation and is based totally on the oral folk epic tradition of the historically nomadic Kyrgyz nation. This fact itself had created a difficulty for the official criticism and was one of the reasons why, for the long period of time, his novels were prohibited from printing and did not receive translation.

The entire story takes one day, there are no chapters, no breaking parts, the narration flows in a stream of consciousness, uninterrupted, with harmonious transitions from reality into the memory. This style does not originate under the direct influence of James Joyce, it is rather an epic stream, from the instantaneous capturing of reality and dream in folk epics. The temperament and energy of his narration cannot be found anywhere in Western tradition. The style of the novel cannot be called "easy", it is written in infinitely long sentences, something unusual for the Kyrgyz literature, and uncommon to the readers that grew up with the clear and rational style of the Soviet prose. The novel can be read the way one listens to the music – smooth gliding movement, like a symphony. This novel tells about the tragedy and the beauty of life at the same time; through simple and ordinary things the author shows the greatness of being. For Kubatbek Djusubaliev this novel evolved to be a great achievement in his literary biography and brought him the all-nation popularity. After his early writings were published, he became known not only in the narrow circles of the Kyrgyz elite and intelligentsia, but the success of *Muzdak Dubaldar (Cold Walls)* became his first acclaimed recognition among the wide audience of the Kyrgyz readers. Unfortunately, the book was published only twenty years after it was written, in the midst of "perestroika".

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His next novel, *Ambarnaya Kniga (The Barn Book)*, full of earthly humor, describes the ordeal of a last day of autumn. In a small village, high in the mountains the fire has been spreading around for several days. Every day the fire comes closer to the village, but the residents are not conscious about it. They are unhurriedly and carelessly chatting what kind of enemy has done that. Some say that it was done by a certain "American spy", others deny it and say

that it is the work of a ghastly local smoker. When this smoker is short of tobacco, he smokes dry horse and donkey manure. The villagers, almost all of them, are the tractor drivers. On that day, the four male protagonists go fishing by an old tractor. The two of them on the tractor are chasing the fish in the river, one is carrying a net, and the other one is standing all this time leisurely watching on the bank of the river. There is supposed to be plenty of trout in the narrow river, but, in reality, there is no fish there at all; all vanished. The latter is the correspondent of a local newspaper, who arrived here to write a story about the fire. The villagers have been drinking all the time and pay no attention to what is happening. Suddenly the big snow falls down, which solves the situation. ***The Barn Book*** was written in 1970, though published only in 1991, twenty years later. It is a funny, brilliant, colorful story, but it has also brought the author the reputation of an “anti-Soviet” writer, because everybody who read the book saw in it a mockery of the “great empire”.

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During the Soviet era, the doors of every publishing house in Soviet Kyrgyzstan were closed for such an original and uncompromising author as Kubatbek Djusubaliev. His following novels – ***My Love Flies to You Like a Bird, and Kozbozhash*** were put into print only in the 1990s. Together with his family: his wife and daughter, he lived a modest life style, never aspired for any literary governmental awards or social recognition. The label of an “anti-communist” and “anti-Soviet” writer was imprinted permanently on his name. He had been facing the “cold walls” for several decades of his literary creative life. As the Chief Editor in one of the Soviet literary magazines told him later, “Sorry, my friend, but your name is on the black list with the KGB, which they have passed to every publisher in this country, so I cannot let your work to be printed. Any mentioning of your name in press was prohibited.” His so-called “anti-communism” was in his truthful language and content of his novels, in his choice of the stories from life of common people, without any political associations or ambitions. He wrote the plain truth of the day and never bowed before the powers.

To survive, Kubatbek Djusubaliev had to apply for a job as an editor on TV and a screenwriter. Together with his wife Klara Yusupjanova, an actress and a talented film director, he created several documentaries dedicated to the life of common country people living in remote mountain villages, their hard life with its rituals and essentials, their folklore and folk traditions. Together they have done such films as *The Shepherd and The Mist, How Tiger Killed Two Cows on The Meadow, Good Morning, Djailoo!* etc. In a short period of time he becomes a well-known screenwriter, having accomplished about twenty scripts for the Kyrgyz cinematography.

In 1981, a collection of his stories and novellas was published, under the title of *Tolubai Synchy*; according to the author’s words, again with lots of difficulties: the book, ready for print, was vetoed by the Chief Editor. The author asked for a special Literary Committee made of prominent critics to settle down the dispute and to reconsider the manuscript, the very rare fact of justice in those times. The result turned to be favorable, and the book was printed, but without the signature of the Chief Editor and just in limited circulation of 10,000 copies. The former Secretary of the Writers’ Union of Kyrgyzstan, the poet Dj. Mamytov, after reading the book, said: “We have to thank the one who wrote the book and the one who published it.” Kubatbek’s response was: “Then you should thank me for both!” A petition was sent by Dj. Mamytov to accept the author of *Tolubai Synchy* to the Writers’ Union of Kyrgyzstan.

Kubatbek Djusubaliev continues his work for the cinema and in 1983 he finishes his next

novel *My Love Flies to You Like a Bird* about a talented writer who is denied publishing after a short period of success. The hero has a family – a wife and his beloved little daughter. Helping the family to survive, he has to take on different jobs, but poverty, hardships, and his unclaimed talent drive him desperate, so that he starts writing his novels... in the air, in the sky. Everybody thinks that he has gone mad, but his little daughter believes in her father's genius and says that one day he will write “...the most courageous, most tragic, most silly, most clever, most insane, most fantastic, most truthful, the greatest novel ever written by the hand of a man.” The author considers this novel the most successful writing in his literary career. Though, again, the publishing of the novel was denied.

Only in the midst of “perestroika” and after the collapse of the communist regime Kubatbek Djusubaliev had overcome taboo on his name and published the book *Cold Walls* (1991), which included the novels *The Barn Book*, *My Love Flies to You Like a Bird*, and *Cold Walls*, as well as an excerpt from his novella *Granny*, *The Stinky Hoopoe Bird Has Come*. In 1992, a fragment from his novel *Widows and Orphans*, written in Russian, was published in the magazine *Literary Kyrgyzstan*. This is a grotesque story about a man totally “occupied” and, thus, ruined by his profession. The protagonist is a translator who does endless voluminous work – conversion into the Kyrgyz language of the “ideological” writings by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Lenin, Stalin and thick Soviet novels. He is an amazingly hard-working and prodigious person; for example, he can make a translation of a thick novel from the life of the “kolkhoz” in two days, then, on the third day, he will receive his fees and go the parties. He is a drunkard and a womanizer. He has had several wives and numerous children; some of them he has never seen in his life, but provides for his extended family. This man has an astonishing quality: he does not age with the years. As always he continues his party-going, he translates a novel in two days, earns a pile of money, and sends it to his families. Every morning he takes a big jar and goes to buy some milk, standing in long lines in the Soviet way, as everybody did. One morning people see him with a strange head dressing – a jar on his head; somebody from the crowd put this jar on him in anger after a quarrel. He is walking his way shouting loudly, through the opening in the jar, just one word: “Kat-t-y-y-k” (*kattyk* meaning both *leaven* and *live-life*).

In 1988, Kubatbek gives a speech on TV in a one-and-half hour program, with a strong criticism of the supporters of the communist regime. His popularity after that speech grows immensely; as he says ironically about himself, “I became a newspaper wise man” («газетный мудрец»). In the 1990s, he starts writing poetry, mostly free verses with a deep philosophical content. His first trip to the West (Belgium and France) with an official delegation from the Kyrgyz Government took place in 1994. Inspired by Paris he wrote a cycle of poems.

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Against the background of the Kyrgyz Soviet prose, Kubatbek Djusubaliev remained a misunderstood figure in his own land, whose “legs were in the dirt of earth, and his head – in the clouds” (KYRG: «башы – көктө, буту – покто» (basy – kyokto, butu – pokto), *RUS*: «голова – в небе, а ноги – в дерьме» (“golova – v nebe, a nogi – v derme”), as he wrote about himself. He relied on the intellectual heritage of the Eastern and Western tradition, bringing them into an interesting new synthesis, as well as on the tradition of the great national poetry, mostly oral according to the ancestry of the living *Manas* epic, which is still being memorized and sung among the Kyrgyz people. He praises the poetry of the ‘people’s *akyns*, such as Zhenijok, Toktogul, Arstanbek, Kazybek, Moldo Kylych, Barpy, Moldo Niaz. Those were really

great figures in the people's tradition, though their art still remains unknown to the world and requires serious studies, especially in the context of the world comparative literary tradition. In the emptiness of the Soviet "written word" he discovered the treasures of the oral word, the style of his people worked out through the centuries and unknown to the world outside of his country, discovered its original rhythm, breath, and wording. He made it sound contemporary; there lies a key to his genius. His works are rich in texture and content, based on parables, folk humor and allusions to the natural wisdom of his ancestors. Only in the time of national awakening his writings are being rediscovered by his compatriots, acquiring a wider range of readers; he is growing into a figure of an intellectual and moral authority, though he never claimed this status, remaining the modest person, an intellectual hermit, and warrior, at the same time, which is quite in the tradition of the spiritual, ancient East.

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In the late 1980s, Kubatbek Djusubaliev takes a decision to leave the city of Bishkek; he builds a house in a far-remote village in Pamir-Alai where he grew up as a child. There he is living now. His daily life is consistent with his spiritual attitude. He has been a vegetarian for more than 25 years, living in unassuming surroundings, dedicating his time to physical work in his garden, reading and writing. Such deliberate retirement of a writer from the society, his inner hermitage can be explained by his serious spiritual inquiry which is more and more concentrated around the question of the destination of a man. He was impressed by the words of Zarathustra "Why was a man created? What is his situation? What is the end of his journey?" It seems that his spiritual path is tied to his search for the answers to these questions, and this explains the sudden revision of his interest in professional writing in his later years. He feels more and more alienation from Literature as a literary craft. He writes mostly poetry and philosophical essays. Now, he is occupied by the study of the world religions, ancient sacred texts representing variety of world civilizations and nations standing behind them.

The Bible... For him this is an eternally beautiful book, a pattern to imitate for a true writer. "I am often being asked," he says, "if there is any book or writer that I like the most or value as an ideal. I respond immediately, "Yes, there is one." Then I withdraw into silence for a long time, I collect my thoughts. It is because each time I think about this Book, I tremble like a child growing anxious in front adults or giants. There has never been in history a book greater in form or in its content, and all true world masters of Literature have been taught by it. Think about the 5<sup>th</sup> Book of Moses or the Book of Enoch.... There is history and modernity in it, drama and tragedy, wisdom of God and the Law for the living. It is a narrative of one and many – about "me", and "you", and "them", as it speaks to everybody."

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Central Asia had always occupied a special place in the cultural and spiritual history of the world. The wave of ethnic and cultural Renaissance among the people of Central Asia has brought to the light new names that were not known to the world during the decades of the Soviet regime. We are very glad that the ACLA Conference is seriously interested in the literary and artistic climate of this region. According to the opinion of Dr. Jyldyz Bakasheva, PhD, literary critic, Director of the National Library of Kyrgyzstan, "...Kubatbek Djusubaliev is one of the most prominent and original literary figures in all post-Soviet literary space." Contemporary and innovative writer, working in different genres, he acquired a popularity among his people

that had outgrown his official recognition during the Soviet times. Sincerity and truthfulness of his words won the hearts of his people. His writings are full of inner passion and excitement before the phenomena of life; his kindness, sorrow, and love characterize his inner culture and humanism. He is concerned with the fundamental existential questions of the human condition on this earth, the problems of the origins of human morality and the search for a human perfection. His individual style has developed, on the one hand, from his knowledge of the world literary, philosophical tradition, and, on the other hand, from his bold use of the oral tradition of his former “nomadic” nation, rich in subtle knowledge of the dialects, folk genres, Oriental parabolic expression of his artistic vision.

There are many writers that had mastered the literary craft, but ***Kubatbek Djusbaliyev*** is a rare type of a true artist who has never compromised his moral principles, in whom the great artist equals the great personality.





Кубатбек Джусубалиев. 1987

Фото: Шайлоо Джекшенбаев.

Kubatbek Djusubaliev. 1987  
Photographer: Shailoo Djekshenbaev.