

# The Problem of Azerbaijani Turkology with Chinese Sources

written by Cavid Aga Cavid Ağa

As the Turkic history tied with the Chinese history, learning the Old Turkic language without the Chinese one would be incomplete. The importance of Chinese sources in study of the history of Turkic peoples is enormous, as in the ancient times and until the end of the early Middle Ages, the Turkic peoples were in economic, political, military, and cultural relations with their neighboring states and dynasties, which were located in the territory of modern China. Therefore, ancient Chinese sources are valuable sources for ancient Turkic historiography.

As I will show below with various examples, it is important for Turkologists to learn Chinese sources directly from the primary sources, rather than from the secondary or tertiary sources. However, since it is impossible (due to language barriers, lack of scientific cooperation, etc.) for both Azerbaijani and Turkish Turkologists to read the original texts in the Chinese sources, names of persons, toponyms, and other things in Azerbaijani, which have been transliterated from the Chinese, often were taken from the secondary or tertiary sources, which leads some authors to come to wrong conclusions due to objective and sometimes ideological reasons. The findings of the recent studies have demonstrated that Chinese sources can still give us the names of many "hidden" Turkic rulers as well as description of many unknown events about vicious Turkic tribes.

The beginning of the modern Azerbaijani historiography is taken from *Golostan-e Eram (The Blooming Flower Garden)*, written in Persian by Abbasgulu bey Bakikhanov in 1841.[\[1\]](#) The

main feature of this work is that Bakikhanov, as a literature review, used the works by previous authors and systematize them. In this respect, it is not coincidence that the Institute of History of Azerbaijani National Academy of Sciences (ANAS) is named after Bakikhanov.

Turkology was first understood as a branch dealing with linguistics, history, and culture of Turkic languages. Linguist Mahmud Kashgari, who lived in the 11th century, systematically analyzed the languages, idioms, and partly, cultures of the Turkic peoples in his "Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk" book. Moreover, Andras Rona-Tas presents Turkology as "a branch of science which deals with the Turks." In his view, "in the broadest sense [Turkology] is interested in any fact which is connected with the Turks, but in a narrower sense it deals with their language, history, literature and other cultural activities."[\[ii\]](#) Abulfaz Guliyev also notes that Turkology, in a narrower sense, is understood as the study of Turkic linguistics."[\[iii\]](#)

The Azerbaijani historiography also has to appeal to Turkology when studying the ethnogenesis and history of Turkic peoples in Azerbaijan. In order explain the relation of Azerbaijani Turkology and Azerbaijani historicism, it is worth to mention, first, the "Turkological Congress I," and then the "Soviet Turkology" journal:

The first Turkology Congress was held in Baku on 26.02.1926-06.03.1926. The "Soviet Turkology" journal was first published in Baku in 1970. This journal is still being published under the title "Turkology."[\[iv\]](#)

Below you will see the reasons behind my argument that the Azerbaijani Turkology developed in the scholarly-ideological direction rather than a purely scholarly one: the neighboring Armenian historiography (e.g., struggle for the heritage of Caucasian Albania[\[v\]](#)), an extensive and subjective use (which will be discussed below) of history by the nationalist

intellectuals of the Soviet era and other such factors prevent the formation of a platform for free discussions in Azerbaijani Turkology.

Dr. Zaur Gasimov[\[vi\]](#) conducted a detailed study on Azerbaijani history. In his article titled “History-Writing and History-Making in Azerbaijan,” he notes that the Azerbaijani historicism, operated within the framework of the Marxist paradigms of the Soviet period, was established on biased and non-objective basis.[\[vii\]](#) By discussing the tendency of Pustakhanim Azizbeyova[\[viii\]](#) to the Soviet historicism, and the active debates of Isa Gambar and Ziya Bunyadov with Armenian historians, the author pointed out that the History Institute of Baku State University (BSU) became the second most important scholarly institution after the ANAS Linguistics Institute. Gasimov also recalls the post-Soviet revisionism in Azerbaijani history. Igrar Aliyev’s publications on Media, Manna, and Atropatene were harshly criticized by historians in the Elchibey era (1992-1993); nationalist historians gave different meanings to these peoples and states within the Turkic ideological framework. Yusif Yusifov (1929-1998) is believed to be one of the main representatives of this “pro-Elchibey” school.

I need to note that Sevda Alesgerova, editor-in-chief of *Millətçilik* [Nationalism] newspaper, published Igrar Aliyev’s “*I told you. Did you see? Yusifov is a panturkist*” quote as a reference to Yusif Yusifov in her article titled “The Yusif Yusifov Period of Our History.”[\[ix\]](#)

Indeed, the book “History of Azerbaijan – from ancient to the twentieth century” written by Yusif Yusifov and Ziya Bunyadov[\[x\]](#) is a textbook for higher education institution, officially recommended by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. That is, the historical concept mentioned in this book can be regarded as the official position of the Azerbaijani state.

In his article, Gasimov classifies the main directions of contemporary Azerbaijani historicism: Karabakh historicism, regional historicism (study of Nakhchivan, Baku, and etc.), Russian-Soviet colonialism, and military historicism. Gasimov points out that although many articles by Turanist authors such as Ziya Gokalp, Yusuf Akcuraç and Ali bey Huseynzadeh, have been translated, in a broader sense, Turanism is not as widespread as it was in the contemporary historicism of Azerbaijan; and the Turkic historicism is narrowed down to Azerbaijan.[\[xi\]](#) Finally, Gasimov notes that because most Azerbaijani historians do not know any language other than Russian and Turkish, they have become outsiders in the international academia.

One of the problems of contemporary Azerbaijani historicism is the problem of the “ancient Turkic homeland.” Dr. Firudin (Agasioglu) Jalilov, philologist and Elchibey’s Minister of Education, is one of the most ardent supporters of what he calls the “Urmia theory,” which states that Turkic peoples were formed as a result of emigration of the proto-Turkic peoples living near Lake Urmia.[\[xii\]](#) Additionally, Jalilov is also in close contact with authors in Turkey who are trying to prove that the Sumerians and the Etruscans were Turkic peoples. It would be more accurate to go straight to our topic without criticizing the absolutely pseudo-scholarly suggestions of Firudin Jalilov.

### **Studies of Historical Chinese Sources**

There is no tradition of studying primary Chinese sources in Azerbaijan, or these sources have only been studied through the secondary and the tertiary sources in the context of the history of Turkic peoples. Historian Dr. Karim Shukurov also acknowledged this at the round table discussions held by the APA News Agency on “Statehood of Azerbaijan: Classified Sources” on September 6, 2010.[\[xiii\]](#) Here are some examples:

P.F. Kazimi, historian and teacher at the BSU

Bibliothecography Department, [\[xiv\]](#) writes in one of his monographs [\[xv\]](#) that after the Talas Battle (751), the Chinese lost their influence over Turkestan. He also links this development to the interference of the Uyghur and the Tibetans to the Tang dynasty. He adds that in the IX-XI centuries, China lost the chances of closely observing the events in Turkestan. In his monograph, he cites various books such as "Sunname" (later Sunginama), "Tangname," and "History of Beshdevir," [\[xvi\]](#) of which cannot be found in any serious sources. However, in scholarly literature, these books should be referred as "The History of the Song," "The History of Tang" or "The History of the Five Dynasties." The only person who names these books as Dr. Kazimi is Uighur historian Abliz Mohammad Sayrami. Kazimi's reference to the books with these names can be explained by his use of the "Turks" Encyclopedia published in 2004. [\[xvii\]](#) In addition, it should be said that Kazimi's argument that China failed to closely observe the events in Turkestan is just the result of his lack of information about the issue. For instance, Cefu Yuanguai [\[xviii\]](#) states that 39 embassies from the Arab Caliphate visited the Tang dynasty between 651 and 798. They could go to the royal palace only through Turkestan. [\[xix\]](#) For example, in the book called Mishu Jian Zhi, [\[xx\]](#) [\[xxi\]](#) the list of Muslim books written in 1273 were given under the title "Uighur Books." That is, the book refers to the Karakhanids. [\[xxii\]](#) And it also gives us a reason to claim that there were quite enough experts in China who could not only list the books of the Karakhanids, but also translate the Arabic alphabet into Chinese transcription.

### **The Problem of Transcription**

One of the main problems of Turkology is to propose hypotheses about the ancient Turkic history without knowing prior Chinese language and its transcription systems. For when these hypotheses were suggested, it become difficult, if not impossible, to investigate the roots of these arguments. As we have seen in the example of Kazimi, wrong transcription of the

Chinese sources hampers the task.

In Azerbaijan, three systems are used to write the Chinese names – Pinyin, Palladius, and Wade-Giles. I need to give a few pieces of information about these transcription systems since they are essential to understanding the subject matter:

1. Pinyin – created in 1950s and currently is the official system for the Chinese transcription. [\[xxiii\]](#)
2. Palladia – was created by Pyotr Kafarov, also known as Palladius and the student of Bichurin, who worked as a missionary in China. It is used for transcription of Chinese into Cyrillic.
3. Wade-Giles – is system developed by Thomas Wade and Herbert Giles in 1892. This system is most used for transcription from Chinese to Turkish.

In parallel with this list, we can say that the acquaintance of Azerbaijani Turkologists with Chinese sources has three lines: The new era researches of the European and American Turkologists (Pinyin), researches of the Turkologists from Russia and the other post-Soviet countries (Palladius), and the researches in Turkey (Wade-Giles)

For the time being, Pinyin system is used in Azerbaijani higher education institutions. Chinese language textbooks are taught by this system. [\[xxiv\]](#) It seems that our Turkologists, however, do not use the Pinyin system, which is officially accepted by the academy. There can be many reasons behind this such as the lack of investment and interest in this field (in the form of scholarships and etc.).

For example, Bakhtiyar Tunjay, a researcher at the Department of Mythology of the ANAS Institute of Folklore, says that “unlike other sources, Chinese sources have never tried to distort history for political purposes.” Then he notes that “a Chinese source called *Tan-huei-yao* mentions the name of one Uyghur composer. Po Mink Ta. This is a Chinese pronunciation. Most probably his name was Alp Mengu Ata [Father Alp

Mengu].” [\[xxv\]](#)

What is this *Tan-huei-yao* book? After a short search, I found that the true name of this book is “唐 昊 妖” (in Pinyin: Táng Huìyāo). [\[xxvi\]](#) Then why did Bakhtiyar Tuncay write it in a different way? When we look at the Palladius system, it becomes clear – it is the translated variant of the Cyrillic transcription “тан хуэй яо,” in the Palladian system into Azerbaijani Latin. [\[xxvii\]](#)

And the name of the person that he called “Po Mink Ta” should be called “白 明 达” (in Pinyin: Bai Mingda). However, in the book we do not see any information whether this composer was a Uyghur or not. Besides, his real name could not possible be “Alp Mengu Ata” because:

1. The equivalent of the word “Alp” in Chinese is “阿” (In Pinyin: Hé). For example, it can be seen in one of the titles of the Uyghur khagans, “阿 毗 伽 蓝 王 阿 毗 伽 蓝 王 阿 毗 伽 蓝 王 阿 毗 伽 蓝 王” (In Pinyin: ài dēnglǐluō gǔ mòmìshī hé píjiā kèhán), that is, “Alp Bilge Khagan, who was blessed by the Moon Tengri” or in the signature of Alp Inanchu Bagha Tarkhan (Chinese: 阿 毗 伽 蓝 王; In Pinyin: Hé yīnánzhǔ mōhè dágān) who was the author of the memorial stone of the same khagan. [\[xxviii\]](#)
2. The equivalent of the word “Mengu” is not “明” (in Pinyin: míng) but “孟” (in Pinyin: Méng kè). [\[xxix\]](#)
3. The equivalent of the word “Ata” [Father] is not “阿” (in Pinyin: Dá) but “阿 都 阿” (in Pinyin: Āduō). [\[xxx\]](#)

Now let us look at the book “The Language of Ancient Turkic Written Monuments” by Dr. Abulfaz Rajabli, a Turkologist and philologist. [\[xxxi\]](#) In the book, along with the original Chinese text of the “Kul Tegin” monument, the Turkish translation of the same text by Hadiye Erturkan, and an Azerbaijani version, which is translated from the Turkish text, is given. Quote from the text:

*Vastly Heaven, there is nothing but what it covers and*







As you see, Abulfaz Rajabli did not translate the text from the original Chinese. Instead, he translated the Turkish translation (by Hadiye Erturkan) of the text into Azerbaijan. Which in turn was also translated from the English text, which was translated by Edward Harper Parker, published in Vilhelm Thomsen's book "Inscriptions de l'Orkhon déchiffrées" with additions from commentary from Parker.[\[xxxv\]](#) In the original Chinese text, "the Chinese Emperor," "Hiung nu khan Khuganja" or the name of the khan are not mentioned.

The mistakes in the original version of this text are ignored in the Turkish translation of 1994 and in the Azerbaijani translation of 2006:

- The name of the "匈奴" (in Pinyin: Xiōngnú) state was written as "Hiung-nu" in the 1911 transliteration of the Encyclopedia Britannica and and later in the Turkish Turkology. Indeed, we do not know how this name was pronounced in the ancient times. Nevertheless, since the modern scholarly literature uses the Pinyin system, the name should be written as "Hsiung-nu." The authors of the Turkish and the Azerbaijani translations did not pay attention to this name.
- The monarchs of Xiongnu did not have the title "khan." They were called "chanyu" (单于).[\[xxxvi\]](#)
- Khuqanya[\[xxxvii\]](#) or Khuganja[\[xxxviii\]](#) are both wrong transcriptions. They were neither written correctly in accordance with the Pinyin, nor the Wade-Giles system. The correct version of this name should be "Huhanye" (呼衍也). Although it is pronounced as "Huhanxie" in Pinyin, since this name is written in the ancient Chinese, its ancient pronunciation should be preferred.[\[xxxix\]](#)
- "Kantsüan" and "Kvan-luh" transcriptions are also wrong. In fact, "匈奴" and "单于" symbols should be written in Pinyin as "Gānquán" and "Guānglù."

## Conclusion

Because the Azerbaijani and the Turkish turkologists and researchers are unable to work directly with existing Chinese sources, they fail to learn about the new developments in their fields on time. We must stop using the Wade-Giles system, which has already lost its relevance, or the Cyrillic specific Palladius system. We could not find any Azerbaijani Turkologist or researcher who worked directly with the Chinese sources. Since I do not have the necessary language skill to translate the Chinese historical texts, I had to refer to other researchers. The main purpose of this article is persuade the readers to accept the fact that Turkology is connected with Sinology and unless our researchers learn the Chinese language the Turkic history cannot be fully understood and that they will always be dependent on the secondary or the tertiary sources and languages. It is time to accept the academic standards in Turkology and move from the catchphrases to real researches.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Education or the relevant authorities can create programs and allocate special grants for education in China. Furthermore, relationships between Chinese and Azerbaijani higher education institutions can be established, regular meetings can be organized, and special education programs can be prepared. Besides, after studying these sources in Chinese, Chinese historical chronicles can be translated into Azerbaijani and be presented to the local researchers.

[i] <http://www.anl.az/down/meqale/ses/2014/iyul/382324.htm>

[ii] A. Roña-Tas – An Introduction to Turkology, Szeged, JATEPress, 1991 – p. 9

[iii] Osman Mert. Ötüken uygur dönemi yazıtlarından: Tes, Tariat, Şine Us (Resenziya: Əbülfəz Quliyev) “Türkologiya”, volume 2, 2018, p. 118

[iv] <http://turkologiya.org/2.htm>

[v] Nora Dudwick – The case of the Caucasian Albanians : Ethnohistory and ethnic politics, Cahiers du Monde Russe Year 1990 31-2-3 p. 377-383 (<https://doi.org/10.3406/cmr.1990.2237>)

[vi] Zaur Qasimov – Studied international relations, international law, and history in Baku, Berlin, and Eichstätt. He defended his doctoral dissertation in history in Eichstätt-Ingolstadt Catholic university in 2009. Currently, he is a fellow of the German Institute of Oriental Studies (Orient-Institut) in Istanbul of Max Weber Foundation.

[vii] Original title: “History-Writing and History-Making in Azerbaijan / Some Reflections on the Past Two Decades of Independence,” see: “Historiography and nation-building among Turkic populations” Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2014 (ISBN 9789197881333). p.69-90

[viii] She was the granddaughter of Mashadi Azizbayov. The author, for some reason, writes her name as Pista Azizbeyova.

[ix] “Millətçilik” qəzeti, issue date May 28 – June 3, 2011.

[x] Azərbaycan tarixi – Ən qədim zamanlardan XX əsrədək / red.: Z. M. Bünyadov, Y. B. Yusifov. – Bakı : Çıraq, 2005. – 720 pages. ISBN 5-552-01386-7

[xi] Ibid, p. 80

[xii] Azərbaycan türklərinin islamaqədər tarixi. Doqquz Bitik: Tarixi qaynaqlar. I Bitik. Bakı, Ağrıdağ, 2014

[xiii] Quote: “For example, most of the information is in Chinese sources, but we have few specialists to study Chinese sources” APA, September 6, 2010

[xiv] His personal page at the website of Baku State University may be found at

[http://libinfo.bsu.edu.az/PROFESSOR,%20M%C3%9C%C6%8FLL%C4%B0M%](http://libinfo.bsu.edu.az/PROFESSOR,%20M%C3%9C%C6%8FLL%C4%B0M%20)

[xv] Kazımı P.F. Türk xalqlarının kitab və kitabxana mədəniyyətinin mənbəşünaslığı. (monoqrafiya) Bakı. Mütərcim, 2014. p. 103.

[xvi] Ibid, p. 106

[xvii] “Türkler”, Ankara, 2002, vol. 4, p. 69.

[xviii] 龟部 (The prime tortoise of the book department) – Chinese encyclopedia written in 1013.

[xix] A diplomatic mission in 696 to one of these embassies would be an apposite example. In 696, the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan sent a gift, a lion in a cage, to the Chinese Empress Wu Zetian. The Empress deliberated with her advisors over whether to accept this gift by the Arabs. Yao Shu (姚 邵), one of the nobles, said:

“Lions are fierce animals that eat only meat. Transporting it from Suiye to the Divine Capital requires transporting through regions where meat is difficult to find. And it will be very costly to do so. Your Imperial Majesty cares for the people and worries about hurting any animals. Because of this, you do not hunt eagles or dogs, moreover you have banned fishing and hunting. You stopped killing to show great grace and you allowed living to show great virtue. Even all that fly and crawl thank you for your mercy. How can you be so exacting on yourself but yet so generous to a beast? Empress Wu agreed and the gift of the Caliph was turned down.” For his biography, see: Old Book of Tang, vol. 89 or New Book of Tang, vol. 102

[http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/oldtangsu/jts\\_093.htm](http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/oldtangsu/jts_093.htm)  
[accessed 05.10.2018]

[xx] 禁书 – “Renewed registration of secret books”, written in the fourteenth century.

[xxi] Wang Shidian & Shang Qiweng, *Mi Shu Jian Zhi*, Zhejiang

Guji Chubanshe (中国出版集团, 中国出版集团 : « 中国出版 », 中国出版集团), 1992, p. 128-129

[xxii] Chinese historians, unlike their western counterparts, accepted that Karakhanids were originally Uyghur rather than Chigil or Yaghma. For more information about this hypothesis that Karakhanids had Uyghur origins, see: Wei Liangtao, "Additions to the Hypothesis on the Uyghur Origin of the Karakhanids" – "Historical Research" journal, Beijing, 1983, vol. 3 (中国: « 中国历史研究 », 第3卷, 1983年, 第3期), p. 112-119.

For the counter argument against this hypothesis, see: Qian Baiquan "Was the Karakhanid dynasty Established by Pang Tegin? – The problems of the movements of the Uyghurs and Pang Tegin to the west" (Northwestern Ethnic Minorities Research journal), Lan Zhou, 1982, vol. 2. (中国: « 西北民族研究 ? 中国西北民族研究 », 第2卷, 1982年, 第3期)

For the Karluk origins of Karakhanids hypothesis, see: Omeljan Pritsak, "Karachanidische Streitfragen 1-4," *Oriens* 3, 1950, p. 209-28.

For the Yaghma origins of Karakhanids hypothesis, see: Vasili Bartold, *Four Studies* I, p. 93

For the Chigil origins of Karakhanids hypothesis, see: Akira Haneda "Introduction: Problems of Turkicization, Problems of Islamization," *Acta Asiatica* 34, 1978, p. 1-21.

[xxiii]

[http://www.china.org.cn/books&magazines/2009-03/26/content\\_17504026.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/books&magazines/2009-03/26/content_17504026.htm)

[xxiv] For example, see: Rafiq İldırım oğlu Abbasov, İmamuaci Aiguli, Könül Əhliman qızı Abbasova. ÇİN DİLİ. – Bakı: Meqaprint, 2014 – p. 110.

[xxv] "The Uyghurs brought horses, wagons, metals, and clothing culture to China for the first time." – Bakhtiyar

Tuncay's interview with Elman Jafarli (dgtyb.az, 02.01.2015) ([http://www.dgtyb.az/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2852:chinae-at-araban-metal-zheyim-maedaeniyyaetini-ilk-daefae-uyghurlar-zhaetirib&catid=38:musahibe&Itemid=486](http://www.dgtyb.az/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2852:chinae-at-araban-metal-zheyim-maedaeniyyaetini-ilk-daefae-uyghurlar-zhaetirib&catid=38:musahibe&Itemid=486))

[xxvi] "Institutional History of Tang"

[xxvii] Then why the "hui" (回) sound is mentioned as "huei"? Although Palladius translated the word as "hui", in later editions the transcriptions "huei", "hoi" and "hui" were all simplified as "huei". As we see, Bakhtiyar Tuncay had read this information from a Russian source rather than the primary one.

[xxviii] For the comparison of this and the other Turkic titles, see: Hayrettin İhsan Erkoç, Eski Türklerde Devlet Teşkilatı, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tarih Anabilim Dalı, Yüksek Lisans Tezi – Ankara, 2008

[xxix] Monqolların gizli tarixi [Secret History of the Mongols], chapter 270

[xxx] For example, the name of Ata Boyla, the Turkish khagan, is transcribed as "鞑靼" (Āduō Péiluō). Source: Ouyang Xiu, New Book of Tang, chapter 255

[xxxi] Ə.Rəcəbli. Qədim türk yazılı abidələrinin dili. II hissə. Bakı, Nurlan, 2006, p. 297-299

[xxxii] Translator's Note: The text is taken from the English Appendix to *the Inscriptions de l'Orkhon déchiffrées*, p. 212 because Rajabli also translated this text from Turkish, which was also translated from this English of the original Chinese text. The problem is that although the English text has parentheses, in the Turkish translation these parentheses were omitted; and since Rajabli does not know English too, in his translation there are no parentheses as well.

<https://archive.org/details/inscriptionsdel00thomgoog/page/n214> [accessed 05.10.2018]

[\[xxxiii\]](#) Tuba Yalınkılıç, BİR DÖNEMİN İKİ FARKLI ANLATIMI – KÜLTİĞİN YAZITININ ÇİNCE VE TÜRKÇE METİNLERİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRMASI-Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Eğitim Dergisi Sayı: 2/4 2013 p.27-47, TÜRKİYE

[\[xxxiv\]](#) My own translation from Turkish into English.

[\[xxxv\]](#) For the book by Thomsen, see: Thomsen, Vilhelm Ludvig Peter – Inscriptions de l’Orkhon déchiffrées, 1896, Helsingfors, Impr. de la Société de littérature finnoise, p. 212

For the translation by Hadiye Erturkan, see: ERTURKAN, Hadiye, “Kültegin Yazıtının Çince Kısmının Tercümesi”, Hüseyin Namık ORKUN, Eski Türk Yazıtları, Ankara, 1994, p. 81-84

[\[xxxvi\]](#) The Khan History Book 𐰽𐰺 (94A: 3751; Çonqua Şucu 𐰽𐰺𐰽𐰺 publication)

[\[xxxvii\]](#) Rəcəbli 2006

[\[xxxviii\]](#) Parker 1896

[\[xxxix\]](#) For the ancient pronunciation of Chinese symbols, see: Baxter, William H., and Laurent Sagart. 2014. *Old Chinese: a new reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press.