



Garifolla Yesim, *An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh Nation: Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli (1845-1904)*, translated by R. Charles Weller, Boston: Asia Research Associates, 2020; i-xxi + 1-278, hardcover @ USD 30,00.

Before discussing the book, it is worth mentioning that the book is a translation of Garifolla Yesim's book "Hakim Abai" (The Elite Scholar Abai), 1994, which was translated from Kazakh language and edited by R. Charles Weller. It is no exaggeration to say that language is a tool that introduces us to other cultures and lives. We can learn about other civilizations only through translations of their written resources. For instance, nomadic civilization gave many material innovations which reflected on the life of the human race. But nomads left very few writings, as most of their cultural artefacts were passed on to the following generations orally and we know about nomads from the writings of their neighbours. Very few writings were left behind nomads themselves. Therefore, considerable attention should be paid to the translations of the rare written resources left by that civilization.

Abai's works have been disturbing the minds of the Kazakhs since the end of the XIX-th century. Abai was a real Kazakh who lived at the edge of two epochs: nomadic-feudal Kazakh and pre-Soviet Russian revolutionary. He was a great Kazakh philosopher and poet who expressed his concerns and pain about the aspirations and fate of his people. Consequently, it is difficult to underestimate the role of works written by Abai in the written Kazakh literature. There are different views on the authorship of the works written by Abai. The majority of articles and books on Abai are the ones that praise his role in Kazakh literary life except for the recent article "Abai's Riddle" written by Zaire Batayeva in English.<sup>1</sup> Batayeva in her article questions the authorship of some of Abai's works referring to documents from archives, articles from then published newspapers and magazines. Science accepts different views to find the truth or to check personal truth against the existing views. Kazakh literary science has a great challenge to use new methods to consider those views.

One of the main contributions of Weller's translation is that it paves the way to discover

1 <https://www.zaurebatayeva.blog/post/abai-qunanbai-riddle-part-1-introduction?fbclid=IwAR0lfkppksNa-Gm-8wEKb99SqOFtaH7qLiIIZMKTnQhBmQpTZ7c4rbBTJcg>.

another culture and demonstrates the worldview of people belonging to another culture, another continent and another epoch. Charles Weller did a great job by editing the translation in a way readable to the English reader with different paragraphing, doing a literary, not literal translation, verifying the English style.

But the translator seems to suggest a controversial method with his translation. The analysis of the English translation and the copies having been written in Kazakh and Russian languages show that it is a free rendering of the two books written by Garifolla Yesim. The translator took the responsibility to mix up two editions. When comparing Yesim's books in the translator's preface, Weller writes that the book of 2012 "is a free rendering of essential message" of the book written in 1994. But in translation done by Weller, we can see that it is a free rendering of the previous two original books. He easily jumps from one book to the other so that the reader cannot trace back to the original resource. Although both Kazakh and Russian versions have references to the pages of the poems mentioned, the English version has nothing to do with it. A reader will not find the right poem without leafing through the book back and forth.

As Weller quite rightly notices, most of the English translations were done via Russian translation and the present case is an exception. It was an exception but of a different kind: a mixture of original Kazakh and Russian versions. The contrary examples for that statement were found in the referenced book. It is very difficult to even for a native speaker to translate books written in other historical periods. And it is a greater responsibility of the translator when he translates it from the second language and not from the original one. One example of the English translation done via Russian can be given here from the above-mentioned books. On page 33 of the Kazakh edition, it is written: "Buryngy eski biidi tursam barlap, maqaldap aitady eken soz qosarlap" where Abai, according to the author, Garifolla Yesim, critically assesses the activity of the biis.<sup>2</sup> In the Russian edition of 2012 the Yesim gives the following translation into Russian: "Kak stary bii, poslovits ne leplu, ne bormochu, na grosh menyaya dushu"<sup>3</sup> which is a stronger criticism. But the English translation will give no sense of criticism at all: "If I look to the past bis, I can notice that they speak very skillfully, adding proverbs to their speech."<sup>4</sup>

The translation of the third section of the reviewed book was done more skillfully.

2 Гарифолла Есімов. Хакім Абай. (Даналық дүниетанымы). Атамұра-Қазақстан. Алматы, 1994. Стр. 33.

3 Гарифолла Есим. Хаким Абай. Издательство Фолиант. Астана, 2012. Стр. 58.

4 *An Insider's Critique of the Kazakh Nation. Reflections on the Writings of Abai Kunanbai-uhli (1845-1904)*. Asia Research Associates. Boston, MA US, 2020. Page 51.

Although more notes and remarks are needed because of the difference of cultures, so that the English reader could be more involved in the social and political reality of the Kazakh's life at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This book could be recommended to the scientists who study the spiritual heritage of Central Asia, the Kazakhs, and the nomads. It will be interesting for social scientists, linguists, and translators of the Turkic languages. And a common reader who endeavors mindful trips to different ways of thinking could be satisfied with this translation, too.

Dr. Gulnara Yeleukulova, Associate Professor  
Satbayev University, Almaty, Kazakhstan.