

Bibimaryam Ibragimova, The paradigms of Uzbek identity. MA diss., Praha: IMS FSV UK, 2015, 96 pages, incl. Bibliography.

The present thesis positions itself an "analysis of the concept of identity and discourse on the dynamics of Uzbek ethno-genesis and identity" (p. 5)--an ambition that remains essentially unattainable, due to the problems the work exhibits in the manner the topic is handled.

The main shortcoming is an obscure methodology as it is not entirely clear what the thesis is--or is supposed to be--about. The delineation of the topic occurs practically only in the thesis title, which isn't in fact specific and says little about the work to be done. Furthermore, nowhere in the text are explicitly defined the aims and objectives, and, what's worse, they are largely unclear to me despite having read the entire text very carefully. Nor are there any research questions to be addressed, a single thesis statement or any other components of a very basic research design that would help the author grasp and frame the topic. This criticism is far from academic. Lacking a clear and firm analytical framework, the thesis simply loses its topical and thematic focus, and also the reception of the text becomes increasingly difficult. In the introductory part on the methodology, moreover, the author speaks of a "comparison" of two historical epochs (Soviet and post-Soviet) and of a "comparison" of two theoretical approaches (primordialism and constructivism) (p. 5) that she supposedly intends to deliver, which further adds to the overall obscurity.

Given that, problems pertaining to the content of the thesis apparently reflect what has been said of its obscure framework. Chapter 2 (pp. 8-34) provides merely a loose and miscellaneous discussion of globalization and multiculturalism, both being of little relevance for the purpose of even such a broadly defined topic as the Uzbek ethno-genesis and national identity. Likewise, Chapter 3, while familiarizing the reader with some important works on the modern Uzbek historiography, features, among many other things, a long part on the molecular anthropology and the genetics of the peoples of Central Asia (pp. 55-59), the relevance of which is also unclear for the purpose of the thesis. For its part, Chapter 4 (pp. 64-86) comprises of the bulk of the theoretical literature. As a result, the text lacks a clear structure and suffers from obscure logic.

As for language and style, I--myself often struggling with academic English--have

perfect understanding that writing a large text of this kind is a particular challenge for a non-native speaker. However, this becomes a problem in situations when the text is incomprehensible and the author cannot make himself or herself understood, which is the case here at times. As a whole, the thesis is no easy read, and at few places I had real difficulties decoding what the author might have had in mind and was supposedly communicating to the reader (see e.g. the entire p. 81). As noted earlier, the text further suffers from excessive excursions and irrelevant content, frequent repetitions of what has already been said, and a lack of coherence. (So, for instance, we learn from the author for at least five times that Yakubovsky's pioneering work on Uzbek ethno-genesis was published in 1941, etc.) Also the author's frequent personal recollections from her life in Uzbekistan are of little help to move on with her main argument.

In formal terms, the bibliographic records in footnotes do not comply with any common citation norm. The author's favorite and most cited work by A. Ilkhamov is never given in full detail. In addition, frequent translations of Russian and Uzbek titles into English and deliberate mixing of Cyrillic and Latin alphabet further obscure orientation in the text.

There are few positives with this thesis, though. Perhaps the most important one is the chosen topic itself, which is generally under-researched and as such is a promising area of Central Asian Studies. This requires some boldness on the part of the student. In addition, the author demonstrated an awareness of some key theoretical works on the issue of nation-building and was able to collect sources on the issue of Uzbek historiography, both in Russian and of Western origin. Regrettably, the aforesaid shortcomings are substantial and are such that they do not allow me to give a positive feedback.

That being said, the present thesis largely fails to meet the requirements for a successful MA thesis and to my best knowledge, it falls short of what is considered a standard at the Department of Russian and East European Studies. For this reason, I do not recommend the thesis for defense. I propose the thesis first be thoroughly revised based on comments given above before it can be eventually resubmitted.

Prague, 6/16/15,

Jan Šír