

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Feruza Shermatova-Omerani, Ph.D.

***BLACK FOG AT NOON / SHASHKEDEGI KARA TUMAN* (1979)**
Aman Saspayev (1929-2015)

Reference: Saspayev, A. (2017). *Collected works*. A. Jakypbekova (Comp.). KutBer.

OVERVIEW

Author

Aman Saspayev was born in 1929 in the village of Ken-Suu, Tup District, Issyk-Kul Region, Kyrgyzstan. In 1937, after his family moved to China, he began his education at a Uyghur school in Moyun-Kuzor, a village in Toguz-Toro County, Xinjiang. He later continued his studies at Uyghur and Kazakh schools in the village of Jany-Shaar and in the city of Kulja (Yining).

Saspayev began his professional career between 1945 and 1947 as a secretary in a government institution in Tekes County. From 1947 to 1949, he worked as a special correspondent for the newspaper *Inkilabi Sharqiy Turkistan (Revolutionary East Turkistan)*, covering Tekes and Mongolkure counties.

Between 1949 and 1952, he studied at the *Bilim Yurti* Teachers' College in Kulja and, after graduation, remained there as an instructor.

From 1952 to 1956, he studied at the Faculty of Chinese Philology at the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing. Upon completing his studies, he moved to Urumqi, where he worked as an editor and later as head of the Kyrgyz-language section of the People's Publishing House in China.

In 1962, Saspayev returned to Kyrgyzstan. Until 1966, he worked as a laborer and tractor driver at the San-Tash State Farm in his native village. From 1967 to 1988, he served as the literary consultant for the Issyk-Kul Regional Branch of the Writers' Union of Kyrgyzstan. Between 1971 and 1973, he attended the Higher Literary Courses at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow.

Saspayev became a member of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1967. His published works include *Gulkaiyr* (1966), *Mayda Tolkundar (Small Waves)*, 1970), *Zymyrykush* (fairy tale, 1971), *Khadizat* (1975), *Partorg* (1977), *Murat* (1978), *Tatym Tuz (A Pinch of Salt)*, 1979), *Yiyk Sezimder (Sacred Feelings)*, 1985), *Too Chabalekeyi (The Mountain Swallow)*, 1989), *Selected Works* (1991), *Stories* (1997), and *Chygyshka Nazar (Looking East)*, 2002).

Several Saspayev's short stories have been translated into Russian, French, Chinese, Latvian, Tatar, Bashkir, Kazakh, Uyghur, and Karakalpak. He also wrote fluently in both Uyghur and Kazakh.

In addition to his literary career, Saspayev devoted many years to the study of the Chinese language. His most significant scholarly achievement was the compilation of a Chinese-Kyrgyz Dictionary containing approximately 55,000 entries and spanning 91 printer's sheets. The dictionary was published in 2003 to commemorate the 2,200th anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood.

Aman Saspayev passed away in 2015.

Novel

The first part of the novel *Black Fog at Noon* was published on December 6, 1979, and the second part was published on February 7, 1992.

Background

Black Fog at Noon is an autobiographical novel in which Aman Saspayev reflects on his life against the backdrop of the political and social transformations that shaped Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan during the mid-twentieth century.

Born in Ken-Suu village, Issyk-Kul Region, Kyrgyzstan between 1926 and 1929, he lost his father at an early age.

During Soviet collectivization, his widowed mother was denied admission to the collective farm because of her family's wealthy social background. As famine spread, the family fled to China in 1933, where they survived in poverty as hired laborers for Uyghur families.

The novel situates these personal experiences within the broader historical context of the 1944 Ili Rebellion, which led to the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic, and the peaceful incorporation of Xinjiang into the People's Republic of China in 1949 following the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. Rather than recounting his childhood under Kuomintang rule or during the East Turkestan Republic, Saspayev focuses on the period from the liberation of Xinjiang in 1949 until his return to Kyrgyzstan in 1962. Through this selective narrative, the novel offers both a personal memoir and a historical account of migration, political change, and the experiences of the Kyrgyz community in Xinjiang during a turbulent era.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Aman Saspaev – Kyrgyz writer from Xinjiang; narrator

Sultan Arykbaev – Kyrgyz educator; principal of Bilim Yurti College

Kyzay Jumabekov – Kyrgyz teacher at Bilim Yurti College

Imin Afandi – Uyghur language teacher

Ziya Samadi – Uyghur writer; delegation leader

Tugolbay Sydykbekov – Kyrgyz writer

Mukhtar Auezov – Kazakh writer

Gabit Musrepov – Kazakh writer

Estebes Tursunaliyev – Kyrgyz singer and komuz performer

Cholpon Jamanova – Kyrgyz ballerina

Gyng – Chinese Turkologist; Saspayev's colleague

Askat Iskakov – Xinjiang official

SYNOPSIS

The memoir follows the life journey of the author, a Kyrgyz writer resided Xinjiang, who searched for education, knowledge, and cultural identity. After the death of his mother in 1948, he left his government position in Tekes, his native county in Xinjiang, and traveled to Kulja, the regional cultural center, to continue his studies. At Bilim Yurti college, he studied under influential Kyrgyz and Uyghur educators and later became a teacher himself. In 1949, he witnessed the arrival of the People's Liberation Army and the beginning of a new political era in Xinjiang. Through socialist education campaigns, teaching experiences, and political studies, he developed new ideas about society and responsibility.

In 1953, he received an opportunity to study in Beijing. His journey across Xinjiang and China introduced him to new landscapes, cultures, and people. At the Central Institute for Nationalities, he studied Chinese, taught Kazakh, and deepened his knowledge of linguistics and literature. Later, he joined a linguistic expedition in Xinjiang, collecting Kyrgyz language materials and folklore. Choosing cultural service over personal ambition, he returned to Xinjiang to develop Kyrgyz publishing and education.

His work eventually brought him to the Soviet Union as part of a cultural delegation. Visiting Almaty, Frunze, Tashkent, Samarkand, and Ashgabat, he met famous writers, artists, and intellectuals. The journey strengthened his connection with Kyrgyz culture and inspired his literary career.

SCENES

A Journey in Search of Education The death of Saspayev's mother in 1948 marked a turning point in his life. Although he had secured a government position in Tekes County, where official documents were issued in Uyghur and Kazakh following the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic, he became increasingly dissatisfied with his circumstances. Driven by an overwhelming desire for education and a better future, he left behind his job, his fiancée, and the family who depended on him. Under the pretext of

traveling to Kulja, he set out on a journey from which he never intended to return. He regarded this decision as his first act of breaking free from the social and personal constraints that had shaped his early life.

Literary and Journalistic Awakening Kulja, the capital of the East Turkestan Republic, became a center of intellectual and cultural life, attracting educated people, writers, and journalists. Uyghur- and Kazakh-language newspapers and journals were published there, providing a platform for literary and political expression. Saspayev contributed news reports in Uyghur and poetry in Kazakh, gradually becoming known among local readers. The publications criticized the oppression of ethnic minorities and the persecution of intellectuals under Kuomintang rule. He later worked as a special correspondent for the Uyghur-language newspaper *Inkilabi Sharqiy Turkistan*, covering events in Tekes and Mongolkure counties.

Beginning of Formal Education Saspayev arrived in Kulja in late September and sold his uncle's horse at the local market to buy basic necessities and search for an opportunity to continue his education. Fortunately, he found Bilim Yurti, a secondary-level college recently established in the city. The institution offered programs in pedagogy, medicine, agriculture, and animal husbandry and attracted students from different regions of East Turkestan. Its principal, Sultan Arykbaev, was a prominent Kyrgyz intellectual who had migrated from the Issyk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan to the Tekes area of Xinjiang. Saspayev had known him since childhood and regarded him as a respected educator.

Supportive Mentors At *Bilim Yurti* college, Saspayev met several remarkable educators who influenced his intellectual development. Sultan Arykbaev was a self-taught scholar who mastered Chinese, Russian, and advanced mathematics and studied university-level mathematics textbooks. Another Kyrgyz teacher, Kyzay Jumabekov, taught history and supported Saspayev's education. With their help, Saspayev was admitted to the ninth-grade Kazakh class, although he had not completed the eighth grade. Some Uyghur teachers questioned this decision. A psychology teacher, after learning about his unusual admission, looked at him carefully and remarked, "When crossing a stream, one should know one's own strength; otherwise, one may fall into the water." The saying reflected his concern that Saspayev might have taken on a level of study beyond his preparation.

From Student to Teacher Despite his weakness in mathematics, Saspayev was invited to remain at *Bilim Yurti* as a teacher after graduation, a position he earned through his own efforts because Sultan Arykbaev had already moved to lead the regional education department. He taught Uyghur classes in Uyghur and Kazakh classes in Kazakh, including a girls' class whose students were mature and eager to learn. Meanwhile, letters began arriving from his young fiancée in Tekes, asking why he never visited. Although he appreciated her intelligence and devotion, Saspayev admits that his youthful restlessness prevented him from responding seriously, and he married only at the age of thirty-four.

Encounter with the People's Liberation Army In 1949, while Saspayev was studying in Kulja, the first units of the Chinese People's Liberation Army arrived in the city. He vividly remembered his first encounter with them. The soldiers, dressed in yellow-green uniforms, surprised the students with their simple manners, cleanliness, and friendly behavior. Unlike the tense atmosphere they had expected, the soldiers appeared gentle and approachable. When three Chinese soldiers visited their dormitory, Saspayev welcomed them warmly and answered their questions about the bedding in Chinese. Their grateful response and humble attitude left a deep impression on him, and he remembered them as sincere and kind people.

A Sense of Liberation After the arrival of the People's Liberation Army, many older students experienced a new feeling of optimism and freedom. Unlike the arrogant and wealthy Kuomintang soldiers they had known before, the new soldiers appeared modest, polite, and respectful toward local people. They often helped ordinary residents by carrying heavy belongings and assisting them on the streets. Saspayev also felt a personal sense of pride, believing that those who had struggled for the people's liberation had finally achieved their goal. He vividly remembered seeing the sign of the Communist Party's Ili Regional Committee in Kulja and feeling that a new era had finally arrived.

The First May Day Celebration Saspayev recalls that their understanding of the Chinese Communist Party was limited, shaped mainly by the Soviet model of equality and social justice. The May Day celebration in Kulja in 1949 became an unforgettable event. Unlike previous small gatherings, it was organized

as a large public celebration symbolizing the victory of the working people. Saspayev watched military preparations for the parade with great interest, observing both the East Turkistan National Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army. He was especially struck by the simplicity and equality among the soldiers, including an officer who shared cigarettes with soldiers in a friendly manner.

A New Political Era Saspayev vividly describes the first large public celebrations after the arrival of the new government in Kulja. He watched the May Day parade, comparing the disciplined appearance of the East Turkistan National Army with the less organized marching of the People's Liberation Army. The celebration, with military vehicles, music, and public decorations, represented a completely new experience for local people. On May 4, Saspayev participated in the first youth rally in Kulja as a member of the presidium. The meeting commemorated China's May Fourth Movement of 1919, when students protested feudalism, imperialism, and government corruption.

Material Prosperity and the Campaign to "Change Ideas" Following the establishment of the new government, Kulja experienced noticeable economic and cultural changes. Shops were filled with attractive new products, including notebooks, fountain pens, cosmetics, toothpaste, watches, thermoses, and other imported goods that had previously been unavailable. While these material improvements impressed local residents, the government's primary emphasis soon shifted to the ideological campaign known as "Changing Ideas." People were encouraged to replace traditional beliefs with a socialist worldview centered on collective welfare. Through lectures, group discussions, and the study of philosophy and political theory, Saspayev and his peers came to believe that education and personal development should serve society rather than individual ambition.

Collective Responsibility and Socialist Education The campaign gradually became part of everyday life. Political study sessions, commonly referred to simply as "study," promoted the principles of collective responsibility, democratic centralism, and service to the people. Participants discussed why they studied, worked, and contributed to society, concluding that individual success should benefit the broader community. Saspayev recalls that these ideas profoundly shaped their behavior and values. They embraced modest living, viewed luxury as a bourgeois habit, and sincerely accepted socialist ideals as morally just. For many who had experienced inequality under the previous system, these teachings appeared to promise a more equitable and human society.

Political Education and Socialist Values As socialist reforms deepened, political education became an integral part of everyday life. Students were paired with members of the People's Liberation Army to learn Chinese and exchange ideas, while Soviet literature and culture were promoted as models for China's future. Ideological instruction extended beyond politics to personal relationships, encouraging young people to evaluate friendship, love, and education through the lens of class consciousness and service to society. Children memorized the "Five Loves"—love of the motherland, the people, labor, science, and public property—as guiding principles. Looking back, Saspayev observes that these ideals were embraced with genuine conviction before later political campaigns exposed their contradictions.

Mass Campaigns and Ideological Self-Criticism At *Bilim Yurti*, political campaigns began with public self-criticism. The school principal openly admitted mistakes such as misusing school resources and making unfair administrative decisions, while teachers and students were encouraged to criticize both themselves and others. Similar campaigns soon spread throughout society, reaching educators, merchants, artisans, and government employees. According to Saspayev, participation was virtually universal. Lectures also emphasized the "liberation of the mind," arguing that people had to free themselves from feudal, religious, and bourgeois ways of thinking before they could fully serve socialist society. Looking back, he recalls how sincerely many young people accepted these ideals and believed in their transformative power.

Teacher Training and the Language of Political Campaigns During the summers of 1951 and 1952, *Bilim Yurti* hosted two-month political training courses for teachers from across the Ili region. Rather than focusing on pedagogy, the courses emphasized ideological education and the campaign to "change ideas." Saspayev served as the leader of one training group and observed the strict political atmosphere created by officials sent from Ürümqi and local party committees. He recalls an incident in which several

teachers jokingly used a political slogan while shaving their beards. The remark was treated as politically inappropriate, illustrating how ordinary language had become highly sensitive during the early years of socialist campaigns.

The Teachers' Ideological Training Course In 1951–1952, teachers across the Ili region gathered in Kulja for intensive two-month political training courses centered on “thought reform.” At the opening ceremony, Vice Minister Ma of the Xinjiang Education Ministry explained that intellectuals had to transform their worldview to serve the people and socialism. He emphasized that the Communist Party’s policy toward intellectuals was to unite with, educate, and ultimately reform them, insisting that criticism was intended to improve rather than punish. The reassuring speech created an atmosphere of optimism. Daily lectures on politics, class struggle, progress, and socialist ideology were followed by small-group discussions in which every participant publicly criticized previous beliefs and pledged ideological transformation.

An Unexpected Reunion with a Beloved Teacher During a break in the training course, the author unexpectedly encountered his former Uyghur language teacher, Imin Afandi, who had taught him in the fourth grade. Once a humble village teacher known for his worn clothes and large family, Imin had since left teaching and earned a living driving a horse cart. Deeply moved, the author recited from memory a Uyghur poem his teacher had written on the classroom blackboard years earlier. Delighted that his student still remembered the verses, Imin proudly recalled the boy’s exceptional memory. The heartfelt reunion filled the author with quiet joy for the rest of the day.

A Teacup, a Child, and the Contradictions of the Study Sessions The author’s diary entry of July 19, 1952 captures vivid moments from the teachers’ study course. In one discussion group, a teacher was harshly criticized for quietly drinking tea from his thermos during the meeting, yet he calmly continued sipping while accusations grew increasingly dramatic. Nearby, a young mother conducted her self-criticism with her infant lying beside her, gently brushing flies from the child’s face as she spoke. Her dress had slipped open, exposing bright red trousers, while a mustached teacher across from her stared awkwardly instead of listening. To the author, these small, human scenes revealed the strange contrast between ideological rituals and ordinary life.

Reassessing the Campaign A diary entry from August 1952 records a significant shift during the teachers’ study course. Officials arriving from Beijing announced that the Xinjiang Party Bureau had committed serious “leftist” errors in pastoral regions by mishandling local customs, religious practices, and ethnic traditions. Responsibility was placed on the provincial leadership, and First Party Secretary General Wang Zhen was removed from his post and transferred to inland China. The announcement sparked animated discussions among teachers from rural districts, many of whom recalled witnessing excessive measures firsthand. Despite these policy corrections, the course concluded by declaring the thought reform campaign a complete success, with participants publicly affirming their ideological transformation and renewed commitment to serving the people.

The Opportunity to Study in Beijing Four years after abandoning his earlier dream of higher education, the author felt an increasing sense of restlessness. Teaching no longer satisfied him, and he longed to continue his studies, hoping for a chance to attend a university either in the Soviet Union or in one of China’s major cities. One morning, after a disturbing dream that left him anxious, an unexpected opportunity appeared. Arriving at school on October 16, he was approached by Nasirov, the head of academic affairs, who quietly asked whether he would like to study in Beijing. Overwhelmed with excitement, the author could barely speak before rushing to seek the principal’s approval.

Farewell to Kulja and the Road to Beijing When the author told the school administration about the opportunity to study in Beijing, he approached the matter cautiously because the request had originally been intended for students, while he was already a teacher. The academic officer Chamey immediately supported him, saying they could send him if a replacement teacher was found. Although the director Ivzullaev was more reserved, he eventually agreed. The author eagerly proposed several possible placements and continued persuading them until he received permission. After completing the required

documents, his anxiety finally eased. On October 30, he left Kulja for Ürümchi, amazed that his long-awaited dream had suddenly come true.

Arrival in Ürümchi: First Impressions of a New World After a three-day journey from Kulja, the young travelers finally reached Ürümchi. The road passed through Sairam Lake, deserts, and places marked by earlier conflicts. The city appeared dusty, smoky, and unfamiliar, yet its wide streets and colorful buildings left a strong impression. Expecting a comfortable stay as students going to Beijing, they were soon disappointed by expensive lodging and poor conditions. Carrying their bedding through dark streets, they finally found a simple dormitory with straw mats on the floor. Despite exhaustion and uncertainty, they waited eagerly for their studies to begin.

Homesickness and the Search for Belonging in Ürümqi In his letter to his friend Tileuzhan, the narrator described the loneliness of Ürümqi, and the difficulties faced by young students arriving from Ili. Food was scarce, living conditions were uncomfortable, and communication was difficult because few people spoke their language. Yet small reminders of home brought unexpected joy. One day, while wandering through the streets, he heard a loudspeaker playing the familiar Russian song “Baryny.” The melody suddenly awakened memories of friends, gatherings, and his previous life. Standing motionless in the street, he felt both sadness and comfort, as if he had briefly returned home.

Across the Desert: From Ürümqi to Kumul On November 17, the travelers left Ürümqi for Beijing, crossing vast deserts and barren mountains. Their vehicle frequently broke down, delaying their journey to Turpan, where they saw the famous ancient minaret and learned about the region's history. The hot, dry landscape was marked by vineyards, Uyghur villages, and traditional underground irrigation canals. Continuing eastward, they reached Kumul (Hami), where security concerns delayed their departure. The travelers encountered Kazakh former rebels who had surrendered their weapons and claimed that the roads were becoming safer, though local authorities remained cautious.

Through the Shiyongxia Pass: Entering Inner China Crossing the Shiyongxia Pass, the travelers left Xinjiang behind and entered Gansu Province. The narrow gorge had once been a strategic route during earlier conflicts. Along the way, they saw Chinese and Dungan villages, Muslim restaurants marked with the sign “halal”, and unfamiliar rural life. The simplicity and poverty of some villagers surprised them. Moving deeper into China, the landscape changed from deserts and barren mountains to fortified cities and larger settlements. In Lanzhou, the first major city they visited, they encountered modern streets, museums, and historical artifacts reflecting China's long and complex past.

Journey to Beijing After leaving Lanzhou, the travelers boarded a train toward Xi'an and finally reached Beijing on December 13. The journey revealed a dramatic change in landscape, from the harsh Gobi Desert to green hills, forests, and tunnels. The narrator admired the politeness and cultural refinement of people in inner China. In Beijing, they entered the Central Institute for Nationalities, built in traditional Chinese architectural style. The narrator was placed in dormitory room No. 255 with students from various ethnic groups, including Miao, Yi, Hani, and others from southern China.

Beginning a New Life as a Student in Beijing At the Central Institute for Nationalities, the narrator discovered a diverse community of students from across China, including Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Tatars, Tibetans, and other ethnic groups. Although he first hoped to enter a specialized university, he realized that learning Chinese was necessary before pursuing further studies. He joined the preparatory faculty and began studying the language intensively. Every day, students memorized dozens of words and characters, believing they could master what others had learned. The institute's rich library also introduced him to Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek, Russian, and Western literature, expanding his intellectual world.

A First Impression of Beijing After arriving in Beijing, he explored the city's vast streets, crowded with buses, trams, rickshaws, and smoke-filled vehicles. He was fascinated by the ancient walls, narrow alleys, and the enormous Dong'an market, where traditional crafts and modern commerce existed side by side. He admired porcelain statues, bronze objects, and other artistic works displayed in glass shops. That evening, he attended a dance gathering organized for minority students. There he noticed Gao

Gang, a Chinese leader, dancing in a style familiar to him. The unexpected encounter with such a prominent figure remained a memorable experience during his first days in Beijing.

An Unforgettable Evening in Zhongnanhai On December 24, he attended a special evening organized for minority students in Beijing. Their bus brought them to Zhongnanhai, the center of the Chinese government and Communist Party leadership. Inside the Huairan Hall, he was amazed by the luxurious decorations and the formal atmosphere. Soviet artists performed the musical drama *The White-Haired Girl*, leaving a deep impression on him with its realistic acting and emotional scenes. After the performance, everyone returned quietly, still moved by what they had witnessed. Despite the exhausting study of Chinese characters, he continued learning with determination and appreciated the kindness shown toward minority students.

Homesickness and Memories of Freedom Despite the excellent conditions at the institute, he gradually began missing his childhood home in Tekes, his family, and the traditions he had grown up with. He remembered his village, the small town near mountains, where he rode his horse, cut grass, hunted in the mountains, and felt completely free. Riding his horse through valleys and forests with a hunting rifle brought him unforgettable happiness. Only after leaving that life did he realize its true value. These memories filled him with deep nostalgia for the simple and independent world of his youth.

Teaching a Tibetan Student As a “junior teacher” at the institute, he was assigned to help weaker students. His student was a young Tibetan man who dressed stylishly but showed little interest in studying. Since both of them spoke poor Chinese, communication was difficult. During lessons, the student often spent time styling his hair, using foreign cosmetics, or chatting instead of studying. He explained that Tibetan customs allowed young people considerable freedom before marriage. Although the student’s learning progress remained poor, his humorous behavior and carefree attitude became a memorable experience for him.

Spring in Beijing and the Journey to Qingdao In spring, Beijing became green and beautiful, and his studies progressed well. He helped a fellow student learn Uyghur and continued reading literature. During the colder months, he and other students formed a small orchestra, playing guitar, mandolin, and balalaika. Later, they traveled to Qingdao for vacation. The coastal city impressed him with its blue sea, greenery, European-style buildings, and polite people. The local Dungan community warmly welcomed them and prepared food according to Muslim customs. He noticed cultural differences between themselves and local residents, especially their lively temperament compared with the calm and thoughtful manners of the Chinese.

Life by the Sea in Qingdao In Qingdao, he was fascinated by the changing moods of the sea. Fog, storms, waves, and the sound of warning sirens created a powerful natural spectacle. During their vacation, he and other students enjoyed peaceful days by the coast, continued studying Chinese, and practiced speaking with local students. He watched children collecting shells and sea creatures in the shallow water, observed ships and seabirds, and explored the beach. Swimming, resting on warm sand, and enjoying the ocean atmosphere became unforgettable experiences. The simple pleasures of coastal life made his stay in Qingdao especially memorable.

Life, Study, and Friendships in Beijing After returning to the institute, the students continued their studies with supportive teachers who patiently helped them learn Chinese. They realized that mastering the language and Chinese literature required many years of effort. Outside classes, they enjoyed dances, songs, and friendships with Chinese students. They sang Soviet songs, shared meals, and visited famous Beijing parks such as Wanshoushan and Beihai. Gradually, they felt comfortable and free in Beijing, forgetting previous political divisions. They studied together with students from different social backgrounds, including children of wealthy families and former officials, which changed their understanding of society.

A New Opportunity: Teaching Minority Languages In the cold winter of Beijing, the narrator’s life entered a new stage. The dean of the language faculty invited him for a conversation and offered him a position as a Kazakh language teacher. The institute planned to open Kazakh and Kyrgyz language programs and needed qualified specialists. Although the offer was unexpected, the dean emphasized that teaching minority languages was an important service for cultural development. The narrator felt uncer-

tain because he had come to Beijing mainly to study, but he began to consider that his knowledge could benefit his own people and other Turkic communities.

Choosing Teaching While Continuing Education After much reflection, the narrator accepted the position but requested permission to continue attending university lectures. He wanted to deepen his knowledge instead of only working as a teacher. The dean supported his request and allowed him to receive lecture notes from several specialists. He studied courses on Soviet history, Mongolian and Altaic languages, Turkic and Caucasian languages, and Chinese phonetics. The narrator became especially interested in linguistics because Chinese dialect diversity had contributed to the development of phonetic studies. He decided to combine teaching with learning and dedicate his knowledge to the advancement of minority languages.

A New Teaching Challenge in Beijing The narrator began teaching Kazakh at a Beijing institute with a Chinese Turkologist named Gyng. At first, he felt that Gyng looked down on him and underestimated his knowledge. Their views differed, especially when translating Russian texts into Kazakh. Gyng preferred literal translations, while the narrator insisted on natural Kazakh expressions. Eventually, the narrator was asked to edit the materials and help create a new Kazakh textbook. Although his work progressed well, he still felt homesick and missed his former life, friends, and freedom. He continued attending lectures to expand his knowledge.

Learning from Books and People In Beijing, the narrator spent much time reading Uzbek, Kazakh, and Uyghur literature from the institute's rich library. He also learned from observing people and their personalities. A visit from a young Chinese girl from Indonesia made him reflect on his own behavior and creativity. Later, conflicts appeared with Gyng, who underestimated students from Xinjiang and questioned the narrator's position as a Kyrgyz teacher of Kazakh. Despite these challenges, the narrator successfully taught Kazakh to Chinese students, built good relationships with them, and helped prepare teaching materials. His students respected and appreciated him.

A Lesson in Teaching and Sensitivity The narrator describes an incident with a student named Zhu Lishan, who was often inattentive in class and received poor grades. When he gently criticized her for not studying seriously, she became deeply upset and cried. Later, Gyng criticized the narrator for being too strict with her, especially in front of other students. The narrator realized that Gyng was searching for reasons to question his teaching. Although he disagreed with Gyng's attitude, he remained calm and continued his work. The experience taught him to be more careful and sensitive when dealing with students from different backgrounds.

The Barrier and Beauty of Chinese Characters The narrator discussed his student named He, who loved literature and introduced him to Chinese translations of world classics such as Byron and Dante. Their conversation made the narrator reflect on the difficulty of accessing great literature because of China's complex writing system. He explained that thousands of characters had created a barrier to learning and communication, even though they had preserved China's ancient cultural heritage. Attempts to simplify or replace characters with Latin letters had faced many challenges. Characters had connected different Chinese dialects and preserved thousands of years of history, philosophy, and literature, making their reform extremely complicated.

A Journey to Manchuria: The Author's Reflections In August, the author joined a group of twenty-three people from the institute for a journey through Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. He had eagerly anticipated visiting historical sites, meeting Kyrgyz descendants, and exploring Harbin. During the train journey, Korean artists performed traditional songs, creating a memorable atmosphere. However, his expectations of Harbin were not fulfilled. The city conditions disappointed him, and he struggled to find Muslim food. While wandering through the streets and markets, he discovered unexpected beauty in ordinary scenes of everyday life. The journey became an experience of joy, disappointment, and deeper reflection.

Harbin and Hailar: Encounters and Lost Hopes The author spent three days in Harbin, observing the city's Russian community and the lively atmosphere around the Sungari River beach. Young people gathered there for sports, dancing, and entertainment, which improved his impression of the city. Later,

he traveled to Hailar, a beautiful town surrounded by grasslands and hills. He attended a formal banquet and observed local customs and political speeches. While exploring the town, he discovered Russian shops and met Mongolian elders speaking fluent Russian. He also searched for Kyrgyz people living there but could not find anyone, leaving him disappointed yet grateful that locals knew of the Kyrgyz.

Among the Mongolian Steppes The author arrived in Manchuria and traveled to the western shore of Dalainor Lake, where he entered a vast Mongolian steppe. He was welcomed by horse-riding Mongols and hosted in a local family's home. They offered traditional tea, dairy products, meat, and hospitality. The author admired the endless landscape, open skies, and peaceful life of the herders. He observed Mongolian horsemanship, livestock, and daily customs, noting their prosperity from sheep and horses. The visit revealed a close connection between people, animals, and nature, leaving him with deep impressions of Mongolian culture and steppe life.

A Farewell to the Mongolian Steppe The author described the final days of his journey among Mongolian villagers. During a feast, Mongolian hosts sang, gave political toasts, and welcomed their guests warmly. At dawn, he admired the endless steppe and the beauty of the sunrise. Later, he witnessed a traditional festival with horse training, wrestling, and folk games. Mongolian riders demonstrated their skills in taming wild horses, while wrestlers of different ages competed with strength and technique. Before departure, villagers accompanied the guests on horseback, racing alongside their vehicle and waving goodbye. The author left deeply impressed by Mongolian hospitality, traditions, and open-hearted people.

Changchun: Industry, Cinema, and Memories The author described his visit to Changchun, which impressed him with its wide, clean, tree-lined streets and modern appearance. He visited the first Chinese automobile factory, built with Soviet assistance, and observed industrial development. He also toured a cigarette factory, where workers performed rapid manual tasks. At the railway station, he happily met fellow Kyrgyz-speaking students but later felt lonely after their departure. The author visited a film studio and watched movie production. In the evening, he attended a cinema and was deeply moved by a familiar song, which reminded him of earlier memories and writings.

Returning to Beijing: Reflections on Language and Learning The author recalled his deep emotions while listening to the song "The Bird Cherry Song," which reminded him of longing, love, and hope. After returning to Beijing from the northeastern journey, he visited Shenyang and saw historical Manchu artifacts. Back at the institute, students removed grass to prevent mosquito-borne diseases. The author resumed teaching Kazakh and reflected on the difficulties Chinese students faced in learning a Turkic language. Despite carefully prepared textbooks, grammar explanations, and teaching methods, he realized that successful language learning depended not only on materials but also on students' motivation and dedication.

Challenges in Teaching and Understanding Students The author described the difficulties he and the Uyghur language teachers faced while teaching foreign students. Despite their efforts, they struggled to find the most effective teaching methods. Under stress and exhaustion, the author became impatient with a student named He, who repeatedly ignored his study plans. His harsh criticism hurt the student, who complained to others. The author later questioned how to treat students who seemed fragile and sensitive. A group of students reassured him that they accepted his criticism and appreciated his dedication. Their words encouraged him to continue his work with greater confidence and patience.

Self-Criticism and Reconciliation with Gyu The author's relationship with Gyu, his colleague and assistant, became increasingly tense. Their disagreements were noticed by others, leading to a special meeting where both were asked to criticize themselves honestly. The author admitted his impatience, limited knowledge, and lack of tolerance, while Gyu acknowledged his own shortcomings. He criticized the author for being sensitive to criticism and too focused on his own work. After the discussion, both understood each other better. The author realized that expressing hidden feelings could help resolve conflicts, but he also understood that changing a person's deep-rooted character was not easy.

The Awakening of a Writer's Voice While living in Xinjiang, the author often felt a strong desire to write, although he had not yet created works in his native Kyrgyz because no Kyrgyz publications existed there.

Reading world literature by writers such as Gorky, Gogol, Chekhov, Tagore, and others greatly influenced his artistic development. He eventually wrote his first satirical story in Uyghur and realized the difficulty of transforming ideas into literary form. Seeking guidance, he sent the story to the Kazakh writer Bukara Tyshkanbaev. The writer's thoughtful critique encouraged him to improve his skills, strengthen his artistic vision, and approach literature with greater dedication.

A Journey into Language and Literary Reflection While in Xinjiang, the author continued to struggle with his literary ambitions. A critical letter about his first story deeply influenced him, making him reconsider his approach to writing. He realized that talent alone was insufficient without discipline, experience, and a deeper understanding of life. Soon afterward, he joined a linguistic expedition to collect Kyrgyz vocabulary and study dialects. Traveling through Xinjiang with researchers, he observed debates about literary language, terminology, and dialect selection. The discussions revealed the complexity of developing a standard language among different communities and strengthened his appreciation for scientific approaches to linguistics.

Kashgar: Language, Culture, and Everyday Life After completing preparations in Urumqi, the author and his colleagues traveled to Kashgar, an ancient city in southern Xinjiang. He was impressed by its lively streets, historical atmosphere, and cultural traditions. Near the Id Kah Mosque, he observed children studying Arabic religious texts and photographed their teacher and students. The city's markets reflected the commercial spirit of Kashgar's people, where apricots, fruits, and local goods were sold abundantly. Staying in a beautiful garden compound, the author admired the orchards, flowers, and peaceful environment. The journey allowed him to experience the region's linguistic diversity and rich cultural heritage firsthand.

Language Expedition and Cultural Encounters in Kyzyl-Oy During his linguistic expedition in Xinjiang, the author visited Kyzyl-Oy, a Kyrgyz region near Torugart Pass, to collect vocabulary and study local dialects. He interviewed speakers from different districts and discovered unique sounds and expressions influenced by Uyghur. Later, he traveled to Toyun village, where he observed traditional Kyrgyz life, including hospitality, horse culture, and the horse games. Comparing local customs with those of Kyrgyzstan, he noted regional differences while emphasizing the shared cultural heritage and linguistic diversity of the Kyrgyz people living in China.

Collecting Folklore and Witnessing Political Realities During his expedition, the author arrived at a Kyrgyz district center and met Chokur Kadyr, a talented storyteller, poet, and folklorist. Kadyr shared a long epic describing the oppression of Kyrgyz people under the Kuomintang regime, which the author carefully recorded for hours. While collecting linguistic materials, the author also encountered local officials and witnessed the political suspicions of the era. A police officer secretly asked him to identify any "counterrevolutionary" elements in Kadyr's poems. The author refused to distort the poet's words, later reflecting on how such attitudes could influence people's lives.

A New Commitment to Kyrgyz Cultural Development After completing his assigned linguistic work, the author traveled to Tekes and met relatives he had not seen for five years. His relatives were preparing to return to Kyrgyzstan (then part of the Soviet Union), which made him feel uncertain about remaining alone in Beijing. In Ürümqi, he discovered a small Kyrgyz section at the local publishing house but noticed a lack of qualified specialists. He shared his concerns with provincial official Askat Iskakov, who urged him to return and contribute to Kyrgyz cultural development. Despite his dream of literary creation, the author decided to devote himself to building Kyrgyz education and publishing in Xinjiang.

Choosing Literature Over Linguistics The author decided to leave linguistics and devote himself to Kyrgyz literary and cultural development in Xinjiang. Although his institute wanted him to stay, he believed serving thousands of Kyrgyz people through publishing and cultural work was more meaningful than teaching a small group of students. After much hesitation, he submitted a resignation request from the Central Institute for Nationalities. His supervisors tried to persuade him to remain, but he refused. When permission was delayed, he stopped teaching in protest. Eventually, his departure was approved. He prepared to leave Beijing, knowing it might be his last visit there.

Establishing Kyrgyz Publishing in Ürümqi In late December, the author arrived in Ürümqi and began working at the Kyrgyz section of the *People's Publishing House*. Refusing a position at a Uyghur newspaper in Kashgar, he chose to devote himself to Kyrgyz publishing. With only a few colleagues, the team prepared textbooks, political materials, and literary works, using publications from Soviet Kyrgyzstan as models. They introduced Cyrillic-based Kyrgyz writing and created printing forms for letters such as ʏ (u), ɵ (o), and ɣ (ng). While translating and editing, the author realized his Chinese was insufficient, so he carefully studied terminology and gradually compiled a small Chinese–Kyrgyz dictionary.

Dreams, Publishing Challenges, and the Struggle for Kyrgyz Literature The author and his colleagues dreamed of developing Kyrgyz publishing in Xinjiang, even planning a literary magazine titled *Mountain Flower*. They eagerly read Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Uyghur journals and sought to promote Kyrgyz literature. Their first book, the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China*, was published in Cyrillic and celebrated as their “first child,” but soon created difficulties because official approval for Cyrillic writing had not been granted. They were forced to return to an Arabic-based script and redesign Kyrgyz letters. Despite constant obstacles, they continued publishing, including a collection of Kyrgyz poets' works, until the Kyrgyz publishing sector was eventually closed.

From Recognition to the Soviet Journey After their Kyrgyz publishing work gained recognition, the author was selected as a young activist and received a badge honoring socialist construction achievements in Xinjiang. Soon afterward, he learned that he would join a cultural delegation traveling to the Soviet Union with Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, and Kyrgyz writers, journalists, and artists. Filled with excitement, he dreamed of visiting his homeland, relatives, and childhood places in Kyrgyzstan. After receiving passports and preparing for the journey, the delegation departed through Ürümqi, Kulja, and Almaty. In Almaty, they were warmly welcomed, and their Uyghur artistic performances received great appreciation from audiences and newspapers.

Encounters with the Giants of Kazakh and Uyghur Literature During the Soviet journey, the author traveled alongside Kazakh writers and poets whose works had long inspired him. He met many literary and cultural figures, including famous poets, novelists, musicians, and artists, and discussed literature and translation with them. Meeting figures such as Mukhtar Auezov, Gabit Musrepov, Shaken Aimanov, and composer Akhmet Zhubanov fulfilled many of his lifelong dreams. He also encountered legendary figures of Uyghur Soviet literature, including writers and composers who shaped modern Uyghur culture. The journey became a remarkable experience, allowing him to meet the creators whose works had influenced his intellectual and artistic development.

Return to Frunze: Discovering Kyrgyz Literary Life After a week in Almaty, the delegation traveled to Frunze, where Kyrgyz cultural figures warmly welcomed them. The narrator felt anxious because he knew little about Kyrgyz Soviet literature compared with Kazakh, Uzbek, and Uyghur literature. In Frunze, he visited the Opera and Ballet Theater, met writers, and experienced the warmth of his homeland's cultural environment. Encounters with figures such as Tügölbay Sydykbekov, Estebes Tursunaliev, and other writers deeply impressed him. Kyrgyz writers asked about the lives, language, and publishing activities of Kyrgyz people in China. The visit awakened his pride and strengthened his connection with Kyrgyz culture.

Exploring Frunze and Experiencing Kyrgyz Culture During his free time in Frunze, the narrator visited the *Kyzyl Kyrgyzstan* newspaper office, where he met Satykn Sasykbaev and Sanjy Eginatiev. He helped translate Uyghur poets' works into Kyrgyz and shared a poem by a Kyrgyz poet from Kashgar. Later, he met Kyrgyz writers and artists, including Abdyrasul Toktomushev and ballerina Cholpon Zhamanova. Cholpon's warm Kyrgyz speech reminded him of village women and strengthened his feeling of belonging. She introduced him to ballet, and together they watched the Kyrgyz production of *Swan Lake*, where Bubusara Beishenalieva's performance deeply impressed him.

A Kyrgyz Evening: Music, Hospitality, and Lost Family Hopes At Tugolbay Sydykbekov's home, Kyrgyz writers and poets gathered for a warm evening of friendship. After the first toast, Estebes and Toktosun played the komuz and shared memories of their journey to China. The narrator felt deep emotions that he could hardly express. Kyrgyz songs performed with the komuz impressed Uyghur and Kazakh

guests, reminding him of his childhood in Xinjiang, where people listened to Kyrgyz radio programs. During his stay in Frunze, he also hoped to visit relatives in Keñ-Suu, especially his aunt Kanysha, but official restrictions prevented the trip. He left without meeting his long-lost family members.

Across Central Asia: A Journey of Culture and Inspiration After Frunze, the delegation continued its journey through Tashkent, Samarkand, Andijan, and Ashgabat. The historical monuments of Samarkand, especially Registan Square, deeply impressed the travelers with their artistic beauty and cultural richness. Uzbek, Tajik, and Turkmen hospitality created unforgettable memories. They visited Firusa resort and ancient Parthian ruins and met prominent cultural figures, including Uyghun, Gafur Gulyam, Tamara Khanum, and Mukarama Turgunbaeva. The narrator reflected that travel was one of the greatest sources of inspiration for writers. Seeing new lands and meeting different peoples expanded a writer's imagination, artistic vision, and understanding of human experience.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Aman Saspayev

Aman Saspayev is the main character and narrator of the novel, representing the life journey of a Kyrgyz intellectual from Xinjiang. His story follows his development from a young man searching for education into a writer, teacher, and cultural figure. Through his experiences in Tekes, Kulja, Beijing, and Central Asia, Saspayev witnesses major historical and social changes while developing his intellectual identity. His memories reveal his strong connection to Kyrgyz culture, his dedication to education, and his reflections on literature and society. As a narrator, he provides a personal perspective on identity, cultural belonging, and the responsibilities of an intellectual.

Determined Aman Saspayev is a determined person who never abandons his desire for education and self-improvement. Dissatisfied with his limited opportunities in Tekes, he makes a difficult decision to leave his familiar environment and search for knowledge in Kulja. Despite academic challenges at Bilim Yurti College, he works hard and proves his ability. Later, he continues his studies in Beijing, mastering Chinese and exploring literature and linguistics. His determination helps him overcome social, financial, and educational obstacles. Through his persistence, Saspayev transforms himself from a young student into an educated writer and cultural figure who contributes to his community.

Dedicated Saspayev is a dedicated intellectual who believes that knowledge should serve society. Although he receives opportunities to continue his academic career in Beijing, he chooses to return to Xinjiang to support Kyrgyz education and publishing. He works tirelessly to develop Kyrgyz-language materials, translate texts, and promote cultural development. His dedication is not limited to personal achievement; he considers his work a responsibility toward his people. Through his commitment to language, literature, and education, Saspayev becomes an important cultural mediator between different Turkic communities. His life demonstrates his belief that intellectual work has a social and national purpose.

Curious Saspayev is a curious observer who constantly seeks new knowledge and experiences. Throughout his journey, he studies different languages, explores various cultures, and communicates with writers, artists, and intellectuals from different backgrounds. His travels across China, Central Asia, and the Soviet Union expand his understanding of literature, history, and human relationships. He carefully observes customs, traditions, and social changes, recording the details of everyday life. His curiosity allows him to appreciate cultural diversity while developing his own literary vision. This quality makes him not only a participant in historical events but also a thoughtful narrator of his time.

Nostalgic Saspayev is a nostalgic character whose memories of homeland, family, and childhood strongly influence his identity. Although he spends many years away from his birthplace, he remains emotionally connected to the Kyrgyz community and traditions of his youth. He often recalls the freedom of village life, the beauty of nature, and the warmth of familiar relationships. His visit to Frunze awakens deep emotions when he hears the Kyrgyz language, listens to komuz music, and meets Kyrgyz writers.

His longing for lost relatives and his attachment to cultural roots reveal a sensitive personality shaped by memory and belonging.

Sultan Arykbaev

Sultan Arykbaev is an important supporting character in the novel and one of the most influential figures in Aman Saspayev's intellectual development. He is a Kyrgyz educator and the principal of Bilim Yurti College in Kulja, where Saspayev continues his education. As an experienced scholar and teacher, Arykbaev recognizes Saspayev's potential and supports his academic growth despite his unusual educational background. His guidance helps Saspayev overcome difficulties and continue his studies at a higher level. Through Arykbaev's character, the novel emphasizes the transformative power of education, mentorship, and the responsibility of intellectuals toward younger generations.

Wise Sultan Arykbaev is portrayed as a wise educator who understands the importance of knowledge and human potential. As the principal of Bilim Yurti College, he does not judge Saspayev only by his previous academic limitations but recognizes his intelligence and determination. His decision to support Saspayev's admission to a higher grade demonstrates his ability to see beyond formal requirements. Arykbaev's own wide knowledge of languages, mathematics, and culture reflects his lifelong dedication to learning. Through his wisdom, he becomes a guiding figure who helps young people discover their abilities and encourages them to pursue intellectual development.

Supportive Arykbaev is a supportive mentor who plays a significant role in shaping Saspayev's educational journey. When Saspayev arrives in Kulja searching for opportunities to study, Arykbaev provides him with encouragement and assistance. His support gives Saspayev confidence to overcome academic challenges and continue his education. Rather than limiting young people by their past circumstances, Arykbaev creates opportunities for personal growth. His relationship with Saspayev demonstrates the importance of teachers who recognize talent and provide guidance. Through his kindness and encouragement, Arykbaev becomes a symbol of the positive influence that a dedicated educator can have on students.

Inspiring Sultan Arykbaev is an inspiring character because his own life reflects the value of perseverance, self-education, and service to society. As a self-taught scholar who mastered several fields of knowledge, he represents the ideal of continuous intellectual growth. His example motivates Saspayev to work harder and believe in his own abilities. Arykbaev's commitment to education influences not only individual students but also the broader cultural development of the Kyrgyz community in Xinjiang. Through his actions, he shows that an educator's role extends beyond teaching subjects; it includes inspiring others to seek knowledge and contribute to society.

Imin Afandi

Imin Afandi is a significant supporting character in the novel and one of the most memorable figures from Aman Saspayev's childhood. He was Saspayev's Uyghur language teacher in elementary school and later became a symbol of the lasting influence of education and mentorship. Although he lived a modest life and faced personal difficulties, his dedication as a teacher left a deep impression on his former student. Their unexpected reunion during the teachers' training course reveals the emotional bond between teacher and student across many years. Through Imin Afandi's character, the novel highlights the importance of educators who shape young minds and preserve cultural knowledge.

Humble Imin Afandi is portrayed as a humble person whose simple lifestyle reflects his modest character. During Saspayev's childhood, he was remembered as an ordinary village teacher who lived with limited resources but remained devoted to his profession. He did not seek recognition or personal benefit; instead, he focused on educating his students. Even after leaving teaching and working as a horse-cart driver, he maintained his dignity and kindness. His humility makes his reunion with Saspayev especially meaningful because his former student remembers not his social position but his sincere dedication and the valuable lessons he provided.

Devoted Imin Afandi is a devoted teacher who represents commitment to education and students. Despite difficult circumstances, he dedicated himself to teaching Uyghur language and literature to young learners. His influence on Saspayev remained strong many years later, as the narrator could still remember the poem written by his teacher on the classroom blackboard. This memory demonstrates how deeply Imin Afandi affected his student's intellectual and emotional development. His devotion was not measured by fame or achievements but by the lasting impact he had on the lives of his students. Through him, the novel emphasizes the noble mission of teaching.

Memorable Imin Afandi is a memorable character because his presence remains alive in Saspayev's memory long after their first meeting. The reunion between the former student and teacher becomes one of the most emotional moments in the novel. When Saspayev recites his teacher's poem from childhood, Imin Afandi is deeply moved and proud that his student still remembers his work. This scene demonstrates the powerful connection between education and personal memory. Although Imin Afandi is not a major public figure, his influence is unforgettable. His character shows that even ordinary teachers can leave a lasting mark on future generations.

THEMES

Education: Path to Personal and Cultural Development

Education is presented as one of the most important forces shaping Aman Saspayev's life and identity. From his early years, Saspayev feels that knowledge is the key to overcoming the limitations of his environment and discovering new possibilities. His decision to leave Tekes and travel to Kulja is not simply a search for a school; it is a personal journey toward intellectual freedom and self-improvement. Despite uncertainty and hardship, he follows his dream of learning, believing that education can change the course of his life.

At *Bilim Yurti* College, education becomes a turning point in Saspayev's development. The college introduces him to a wider intellectual world and connects him with dedicated teachers who recognize his potential. Sultan Arykbaev's support allows him to enter a higher level of study even though his previous education is incomplete. Through this experience, Saspayev learns that encouragement and guidance from mentors can help individuals overcome personal limitations. Later, as he becomes a teacher himself, he understands that knowledge carries a responsibility to serve others.

His studies in Beijing further expand his understanding of education. Living among students from different ethnic groups, learning Chinese, and studying various fields of knowledge expose him to new cultures and ideas. Education becomes more than acquiring information; it becomes a way to understand society, language, and human connections. His later decision to work for Kyrgyz publishing and cultural development reflects his belief that learning should benefit the wider community.

Through Saspayev's experiences, the novel shows that education shapes both personal identity and collective memory. Teachers leave lasting impressions, schools become places of transformation, and knowledge becomes a bridge between different peoples. For Saspayev, education is not only a path toward individual achievement but also a means of preserving language, strengthening culture, and contributing to the future of his people.

Illustrative Moment: Sultan Arykbaev helps Saspayev enter the ninth-grade Kazakh class at *Bilim Yurti* College despite his incomplete schooling. Some teachers question whether he is prepared for such a challenge, but Arykbaev recognizes his determination and ability. This scene reveals how a teacher's trust can change a young person's future. Saspayev later remembers Arykbaev not only as an educator but as someone who opened the door to a new intellectual life. The moment symbolizes the power of mentorship and the importance of believing in a student's potential.

Identity: Language, and Cultural Preservation

Language and cultural identity are deeply connected themes throughout Aman Saspayev's life story. As a Kyrgyz intellectual growing up in Xinjiang, Saspayev lives in a multilingual environment where Kyrgyz, Uyghur, Kazakh, Chinese, and Russian languages exist side by side. His experiences teach him

that language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of history, memory, and belonging. Through his work as a teacher, translator, and publisher, he recognizes that preserving a language means protecting the cultural experiences and traditions of the people who speak it.

Saspayev's efforts to develop Kyrgyz-language publishing in Xinjiang demonstrate his commitment to strengthening Kyrgyz cultural identity. After returning from Beijing, he chooses to work in the Kyrgyz section of the People's Publishing House rather than continue his academic career. Although the work is difficult, he and his colleagues prepare textbooks, literary works, and other publications to support the development of Kyrgyz education and literature. His struggle to create suitable writing systems and printing materials shows that language development requires not only cultural passion but also practical dedication.

The novel also presents identity as a continuous process shaped by personal experiences and cultural encounters. Saspayev grows up among different ethnic communities and learns from Uyghur and Kazakh intellectual traditions while remaining deeply connected to his Kyrgyz heritage. His journey to Frunze becomes an emotional return to a cultural homeland he has known mostly through books and memories. Meeting Kyrgyz writers, hearing the Kyrgyz language, and listening to komuz music awaken feelings of pride and belonging.

Through Saspayev's life, the novel shows that identity is not limited to geography or political borders. A person can belong to multiple cultural worlds while preserving a strong connection to ancestral traditions. Language becomes the bridge that connects generations, communities, and personal memories. For Saspayev, protecting the Kyrgyz language is not only a literary task but also a responsibility to preserve the voice and cultural heritage of his people.

Illustrative Moment: Saspayev begins working at the Kyrgyz section of the People's Publishing House in Ürümqi. He and his colleagues face many difficulties while preparing Kyrgyz books, developing printing materials, and adapting the script for publication. Their first book becomes a symbol of hope and achievement, even though later political changes create obstacles. This episode reveals Saspayev's belief that literature and language are essential for cultural survival. His dedication shows that preserving a language requires patience, creativity, and commitment from individuals who understand its importance for future generation

Turkic Peoples: Cultural Exchange and Friendship Among Turkic Peoples in Xinjiang

Cultural exchange and friendship among Turkic peoples are central themes in Aman Saspayev's life journey. Growing up in Xinjiang, a multilingual and multicultural region where Kyrgyz, Uyghur, Kazakh, and other communities lived together, Saspayev developed a deep appreciation for different languages and traditions. His experiences demonstrate that cultural identity is shaped not only by one's own ethnic heritage but also through interaction with neighboring communities.

As a young intellectual, Saspayev participated actively in the literary and educational life of Xinjiang. At Bilim Yurti College, he studied alongside students from different ethnic backgrounds and was influenced by educators who valued knowledge beyond ethnic boundaries. Later, as a teacher, he taught Uyghur and Kazakh classes, reflecting the important role of these languages in the educational environment of the region. Through teaching, translation, and literary activities, he became familiar with the cultural worlds of other Turkic peoples.

Language became a bridge connecting these communities. Saspayev worked with Uyghur and Kazakh writers, translated literary works, and followed publications in different Turkic languages. These experiences broadened his understanding of the shared cultural heritage among Turkic peoples. At the same time, they strengthened his awareness of the need to preserve Kyrgyz language and culture, which later became the main focus of his publishing and literary work in Xinjiang.

His journey through Central Asia further expanded this cultural connection. Meetings with Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uyghur, Uzbek, and other writers and artists revealed common traditions expressed through literature, music, and oral heritage. His encounters with figures such as Mukhtar Auezov, Tügölbay Sydykbekov, and other cultural representatives showed him that artistic exchange could unite people across political and geographical borders.

Illustrative moment: At Bilim Yurti College, students from different ethnic backgrounds enjoyed Kyrgyz songs broadcast on the radio, including "Ak Bermet," "Alýmkan," "Kan-Jayloo," and "Oy, Bulbul." Although

these songs belonged to Kyrgyz cultural tradition, they were also loved by Uyghur and Kazakh listeners. Later, during gatherings with writers and artists, the sound of the komuz created a shared emotional atmosphere among people from different communities. These moments showed Saspayev that music and oral traditions could connect Turkic peoples beyond language and regional differences.

Turkic languages: Kyrgyz Language Development and Writing Reform in Xinjiang

The development of the Kyrgyz language and writing system in Xinjiang represents an important part of Aman Saspayev's cultural mission. Throughout his life, he viewed language as the foundation of education, literature, and collective memory. When he returned to Xinjiang after studying in Beijing, he chose to work in the Kyrgyz section of the People's Publishing House because he believed that creating resources in the Kyrgyz language was essential for his community.

At that time, Kyrgyz readers in Xinjiang had limited access to textbooks, literary works, and educational materials in their native language. Saspayev and his colleagues began building a publishing system almost from the beginning. They used publications from Soviet Kyrgyzstan as examples and worked to prepare books, translations, and teaching materials. One of their major achievements was adapting the Cyrillic-based Kyrgyz alphabet for local publishing. They created printing forms for specific Kyrgyz letters, including u, o, and ng, which were necessary for accurately representing Kyrgyz pronunciation.

The appearance of Kyrgyz books in Cyrillic was a significant cultural achievement. For Saspayev, these publications represented more than educational tools; they were a way to strengthen literacy, encourage literary creativity, and preserve Kyrgyz identity in Xinjiang. The creation of a modern written language system provided new opportunities for younger generations to read and study in their mother tongue.

However, language development was closely connected with political decisions. After their first publications appeared, Saspayev and his colleagues were informed that Cyrillic writing had not received official approval. They were required to redesign materials using an Arabic-based script. This sudden change created difficulties for editors, writers, and readers because they had to adapt their work to a different writing tradition.

His efforts reveal the challenges faced by minority communities in maintaining their linguistic heritage while responding to changing political environments.

Illustrative Moment: Saspayev remembers the preparation of the first Kyrgyz book printed in Cyrillic in Xinjiang as a moment of great excitement. He and his colleagues treated the publication as a historic achievement, carefully checking every letter and creating new printing forms for Kyrgyz sounds that did not exist in Chinese printing technology. When the book was finally completed, they felt that they had opened a new path for Kyrgyz education and literature. However, their joy was interrupted when they learned that Cyrillic writing could not continue officially. The need to return to Arabic script showed how closely language development related to political circumstances.

Patrotism: Homeland

The theme of homeland is central to Aman Saspayev's life story. Born in Kyrgyzstan and later living in Xinjiang, Saspayev experiences homeland as both a physical place and an emotional connection shaped by memory, family, language, and culture. Although his education, professional life, and literary development take place largely in Xinjiang, his attachment to Kyrgyzstan remains a lasting part of his identity.

Saspayev's childhood memories of Kyrgyz landscapes, family relationships, and traditional ways of life become an important source of emotional strength throughout his journey. When he leaves his familiar environment in search of education and personal growth, he enters new cultural spaces among Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other communities. These experiences broaden his worldview, but they also deepen his awareness of his Kyrgyz roots.

His visit to Kyrgyzstan becomes a powerful moment of reconnection with his homeland. In Frunze, he encounters Kyrgyz writers, artists, music, and everyday speech that awaken feelings of familiarity and belonging. Hearing the Kyrgyz language and listening to the komuz remind him of the cultural world

from which he came. His wish to visit relatives in Keng-Suu, especially family members he had not seen for many years, reveals his desire to reconnect with his personal past.

At the same time, Saspayev's life shows that homeland is not only defined by borders. Through his work in Xinjiang, he contributes to the preservation and development of Kyrgyz language and literature among Kyrgyz communities outside the Soviet Kyrgyz Republic. His experience demonstrates that cultural identity can survive across geographical distances through language, memory, and shared traditions.

Illustrative Moment: During his journey to Frunze, Saspayev feels a deep emotional connection with the homeland he had left behind. Meeting Kyrgyz writers, hearing familiar speech, and experiencing Kyrgyz cultural life awaken memories of his origins. He is especially moved by the warmth of ordinary conversations and expressions that remind him of village life. Although he cannot visit Keng-Suu and meet his relatives because of official restrictions, the journey allows him to rediscover his connection with Kyrgyzstan. The visit becomes not only a physical return but also an emotional reunion with his cultural roots.

Politics: Political Transformation and Socialist Movements in Xinjiang

The political changes in Xinjiang during the mid-twentieth century form an important background to Aman Saspayev's personal and intellectual development. His memoir presents these events not only as historical changes but also as experiences that influenced the lives, hopes, and beliefs of ordinary people. As a young man searching for education and a better future, Saspayev witnessed the transformation of society around him and gradually became involved in the new educational and cultural environment.

When Saspayev arrived in Kulja, the city was a center of intellectual activity shaped by the political atmosphere of the East Turkestan Republic period. Schools, newspapers, and cultural institutions created new opportunities for local intellectuals and writers. For Saspayev, education became closely connected with social change, and he viewed the development of schools and publishing as important steps toward the advancement of his community.

The arrival of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Kulja in 1949 marked another turning point in the region's history. Saspayev remembered his first encounters with soldiers with curiosity and surprise. Their simple appearance, discipline, and respectful behavior differed from his previous impressions of military forces. These personal interactions shaped his early understanding of the new political order and created a sense of optimism about the possibilities of equality and social improvement.

Following the establishment of the new government, socialist ideas became increasingly present in education and public life. At Bilim Yurti College, students and teachers participated in political discussions, ideological studies, and self-criticism meetings. Saspayev recalls that many young intellectuals sincerely accepted ideas such as collective responsibility, service to society, and the importance of education. They believed that knowledge should not serve only personal ambitions but should contribute to the development of the people.

Through Saspayev's memories, the novel shows how historical transformations shaped individual identities and created both hopes and challenges for a generation that lived through a period of profound change.

Illustrative Moment: One of the most memorable scenes in the novel is Saspayev's first encounter with the People's Liberation Army in Kulja in 1949. As a student, he expected the arrival of soldiers to create fear and uncertainty, but his experience was different. When several soldiers visited the student dormitory, he was struck by their simple clothing, polite manners, and friendly attitude. Speaking with them in Chinese, Saspayev noticed their humility and willingness to communicate with local people. This small personal encounter became a symbol of the larger political changes taking place in Xinjiang. For Saspayev, the new era was first experienced not through official speeches but through everyday human interactions.