
Difficulties of Mental Mapping of Historical Time in the Chuvash National Identity: Cultural Continuities and Intellectual Failures

Maksym W. Kyrchanoff
Voronezh State University

ABSTRACT

The concepts of historical time are among the focal points in the perception and invention of national history. The concepts and categories of historical time were actualized among non-historical nations when the latter became independent actors of historical process. The nationalists played a peculiar role in inventing the idea of historical time in general when they were fighting against their opponents from other formally dominating groups. The Chuvash concept of historical time was formed by the Chuvash nationalists while the first attempts to invent the Chuvash historical time took place between the two World Wars when the Chuvash nationally-oriented intellectuals tried to separate the category of the Chuvash historical time from the Russian collective representations of historical time. The Chuvash Soviet intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century developed a loyal alternative of historical time integrated into a greater Soviet-Russian historical context. The collapse of the Soviet Union and fragmentation of the common historical space led to the disintegration of holistic historical time. The Chuvash intellectuals of the 1990s and the 2000s tried to revive a national idea of historical time of their predecessors from the interwar period. The intellectual community of historians in Chuvashia consists of two groups of historians who cultivate either a national Chuvash or a pro-Russian version of historical time. On the one hand, the general uncertainty of the

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Chuvash historical time concept among intellectuals, on the one hand, stimulates the rise of historical pessimism. On the other hand, the historical situation in general has created a landscape for intellectual maneuvers. Therefore, the debates about historical time among the Chuvash nationalists still continue. The general trajectories of collective representations of transformations of historical time are still unclear.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Statements and assumptions about nationalists as the founding fathers of modern nations become common place in national historiographies and international historiography of nationalism in general. The nationalist intellectuals assumed the lead in the formation, invention and imagination of modern nations (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Masalha 2007; Dieckhoff 2013; Guyatt 2007; Spivak 2009). These intellectuals, including writers, poets and historians proposed to the nations of their dreams the cultural attributes and social markers which, as nationalists believed, would radically improve their status and transform them in historical nations. The concepts of historical time and national history were among the most important systemic markers that determined the process of formation and development of the nations which entered the historical arena later than other European nations. The slow formation of modern nations and their national identities resulted from the negative historical and social dynamics. Some modern nations turned culturally and socially visible among other nations rather late because the peripheral nationalisms actively developed with a significant delay.

In different European areas the nationalists with a considerable delay managed to offer the concepts of national history and historical time to their potential fellow citizens. The issues of intellectuals' and nationalists' participation and their role in the development of historical imagination are studied in some works of the Russian and foreign scholars of nationalism (Gryncharov 2006; Vacheva and Papuchiev 2012). Most of these texts are focused on tactics and strategies of nationalist intellectuals in writing of the great and synthetic versions of national history in the form of grand narratives. The scholars of nationalism (Vacheva 2002; Alipieva 2006) prefer to analyze

in what way the intellectuals attempt to nationalize the past, reinterpret and invent new versions and visions of national history during the periods and eras of nationalist agitation and nationalistic leaders in transitional societies. These studies can be recognized productive and promising, but they can be defined as normative: the themes and their main developments lines are known beforehand because the classical corpus of texts in Nationalism Studies provides the historian of nationalism with a certain number of methods.

The inventionist and imaginalist approaches (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) are among the most productive and promising in current Nationalism Studies. The problem of imagination and invention of historical time, collective nationalist concepts and representations about time as an element of national existence, of various nationalist tactics and strategies of nationalization and historical time appropriation remain in the shadow of numerous other studies focused predominantly on nations, nationalisms and identities. In this article we will attempt to analyze the nationalists' strategies and tactics in inventing and imagining of historical time concept in the context of social and cultural transformations. It is extremely doubtful to analyze the collective representations and ideas about time exclusively within the paradigm adopted in Nationalism Studies. It seems more productive to actualize the theoretical and methodological achievements of the post-modernist historiography since the historians radically revise the collective concepts and ideas about time (Koposov 2013; Boitsov 2013). The postmodernist historiography dismantled the 'time' category from historical process, and it lost its internal unity. World history and national histories transformed from something primordial to imagined and artificial intellectual constructs, multiplicity of histories also was actualized as systemic characteristic of history in general and historical time in particular.

Understanding and recognizing that the subject of this article is extremely broad, we will focus on the efforts to construct the historical time concept in the Chuvash identity. The scope of general studies on Chuvash nationalism is rather limited; the articles on the role of the time concept in Chuvash nationalist identity and imagination are scarce (Pogodin 1999). The attempts of the similar con-

cepts studies in formation and development of modern nations among other ethnic groups of the Volga region (Vasilyev and Shibano 1997) are also quite a few in historiography. Therefore, in the following sections the author will focus on the analysis of tactics and strategies of the Chuvash nationalism in imagination and invention of historical time categories in the context of modern Chuvash identity.

**FINDING HISTORY AND TAMING TIME:
THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATES IN THE PERIOD
BETWEEN THE 1920s AND 1930s
AND THEIR LEGACY**

The political changes that had revolutionary character and had institutionalized the Chuvash autonomy within Russian Federation also led to significant transformations in political and intellectual environment in sovietized Chuvashia. The Chuvash intellectuals began to debate about the development of Chuvash language (Timuha Hēvetēřē 1928; *The Textbook*....1934; Vanerkke 1926) and about the place and role of Chuvash nation in history. The academic studies of Chuvash language and practical attempts of its wide promotion between the 1920s and 1930s had a dual function. The Chuvash linguists, on the one hand, actualized the 'past' narratives since they invented, understood, and perceived language as a living form of continuity between different historical generations of the imagined Chuvash nation. On the other hand, the language was also perceived as an expression of the Chuvash nation's potential in its 'future' dimensions.

The dichotomy between 'national history' and 'national language', that was realized and actualized by the Chuvash intellectuals between the 1920s and 1930s, lost its value by the mid-1950s, when finally, national history was forcibly replaced by the history of the Chuvash people, or the history of the Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. These discussions brought up to date the 'past' and 'future' problems of the Chuvash nation. The Chuvash intellectuals invented and imagined Chuvash history as an effective tool to strengthen and develop the national identity. The historical studies of the 1920s and 1930s were widely applied for the formation of historicism in its Chuvash version.

The revolution and institutionalization of the Chuvash autonomy allowed many Chuvash intellectuals to set Chuvashia within a newly invented political geography of the Soviet Union. Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši was among the remarkable representatives of revolutionary generation of the Chuvash intellectuals. Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši (1925) believed that ‘the Chuvash history’ as a part of the academic historical studies should focus on the analysis and studies of ‘the Chuvash nation’ history. In the same period Vanter Kurijě (1921) tried to cultivate the Chuvash historical imagination based on the Bulgarian and Golden Horde narratives. Vanter Kurijě’s activities supported the Chuvashization of history and collective representations about the historical past. Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši (1928) also believed that in the past the neighbors deprived the Chuvash nation’s right to be an independent and autonomous actor of history. In 1928 Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši stressed that

The period between 1236 and 1917 was the period of servitude existence... The Russian regime of oppression was the continuation of the Tatar oppression period... the wild Asians began the destruction of the Chuvash state ... and the Russian statehood that was brutally predatory and stupid in its cruelty completed the subjugation of the Chuvash nation (*The First ...* 1928: 63).

Therefore, Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši (1925) believed that the Chuvash nation within Russian-Tatar political struggles played a passive role, while the Tatars and Russians actually erased the Chuvash nation from history and the Russian intellectuals contributed a lot to its perception as of a primitive and non-historical people. The Chuvash intellectuals and historians of the 1920s took the first steps towards the creation and institutionalization of the Chuvash historical narrative, invention of the Chuvash historical time concepts and Chuvash national history. These attempts were negatively evaluated by the Chuvash historians of radical and orthodox communist orientation who actively criticized Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši and Vanter Kurijě being their ideological opponents.

Vasilii Dimitriev, the leading Soviet and post-Soviet Chuvash historian, also criticized the ideas of the Chuvash nationally-oriented intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s as well as rejected the concept of individual and independent Chuvash history, historical

time and process in general. While Vanter Kurijė, Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši, and V. Smolin (1921) tried to write the history of Chuvashia as a national Chuvash history, Ivan Kuznetsov and Vasilii Dimitriev (2003) being their ideological and methodological opponents on the contrary developed a deeply pro-Russian pattern of history writing. While the Chuvash nationally-oriented intellectuals invented the Chuvash nation as an active and major subject of the Chuvash history, the Soviet and post-Soviet Chuvash historians actually deprived the Chuvash nation of its historical individuality. Vanter Kurijė, Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši, and V. Smolin tried to construct the imagined category of historical time in the Chuvash frame of reference, whereas their ideological opponents were inclined to present the Russian influence as an extremely positive basis of the Chuvash history, yet the Chuvash nation in this version of historical memory would transform in a silent majority.

The main lines and vectors of discrepancies and contradictions between the Chuvash historians can be presented in the acceptance or rejection of history of Chuvashia as a national history. Vanter Kurijė, Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši and V. Smolin preferred to write the history of Chuvashia in national framework and they imagined it as a national Chuvash history. Their ideological and political critics and opponents, including Ivan Kuznetsov, accused them of national stereotypes and prejudices; moreover, Ivan Kuznetsov accused Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši of historical falsification since the former presumed that Petrov-Tinehpi Mišši instead of writing a class struggle history made active efforts to write it as a history of 'Chuvash people and Chuvash nation' (Kuznetsov 1930, 1931). Ivan Kuznetsov thought that his opponents' interest in the history of Chuvashia as the folk and national history would support ideologization and mythologization of history in general.

Historical narratives were actively applied to revive images and dimensions of the past historical time within the Chuvash identity. In the late 1990s Evgeniy Pogodin when commenting on the debates and discussions among the Chuvash intellectuals during the inter-war period, presumed that 'the reaction Marxist historicism has defeated Chuvash liberal positivist historicism' (Pogodin 1999). These histories were not considered as the Chuvash national ones since an ideological struggle against the 'bourgeois national-

ism', including Chuvash, periodically took place in the USSR and also in autonomous republics. The role of the Chuvash language also gradually reduced. The invented categories of historical landscape and historical time in the Chuvash national imagination only formally and nominally continued to exist and function while the processes of gradual denationalization and actual Russification contributed to the erosion of national identities of the non-Russian nations and ethnic groups in the USSR. The historical and linguistic studies between the 1920s and 1930s focused on the representations of the collective 'past' and 'future' in the Chuvash identity. In the second half of the twentieth century the mental 'past' and 'future' narratives migrated to the Chuvash literature. This became possible because the Chuvash intellectuals of the interwar decades wrote the history from national positions. They also transformed the Chuvashes from non-historical *inorodtsi* [aliens] into a historical Chuvash nation and also formed and proposed the imagined category of Chuvash historical time and Chuvash historicism.

**RE-INVENTING HISTORICAL TIME:
HISTORICAL SUBJECTIVITY AND
CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL LOYALTY
IN THE CHUVASH INTELLECTUAL DEBATES**

In the twentieth century the Chuvash intellectuals had an extremely difficult relationship with historical time, and their attempts to find the place of the Chuvash nation in history also were very controversial. The attempts to define the Chuvashes' position in the historical context of the post-Soviet Chuvash Republic were far from successful. These problems were the results of intellectual and mental dependence of the Chuvash historiography from the Russian and Soviet historiography. The Soviet historiography as a unique type of imperial historiography successfully imitated federalism while establishing historical science in the Soviet professional historian communities and autonomous republics. National historians in the Soviet republics proposed and developed theories and concepts according to which the nations had voluntarily joined the Russian state.

The history within this intellectual framework could be generally considered and invented as exclusively Russian or Soviet. The

national histories of republics could be imagined in the RSFSR as only local, regional, and minor versions of the greater Russian or Soviet history. This informal national hierarchy within the USSR, where the policy of friendship among nations was officially proclaimed, in fact supported the assimilation of non-Russian ethnic groups and nations who would lose their national histories and identities. The historical time in the Soviet historiography could be only Russian and Soviet. The political elites maintained this intellectual situation until the effective mechanisms of ideological and political control and censorship finally collapsed in the crisis of the late 1980s. The collapse of the Soviet Union made relevant and also influential those numerous historiographical theories and concepts that had been suppressed and intentionally ignored in previous years being inconvenient for the official communist ideology.

The problems of historical time and different symbolic statuses of the Chuvash nation in the historical context were actualized in the discussion between two famous Chuvash historians. Arsenii Izorkin (1932–2006) and Vasilii Dimitriev (1924–2013) were among the leading Chuvash historians, but their influences and potentials in the Chuvash academic community were rather different (*Chuvashskoe...* 2000: 181–191). The personality of Vasilii Dimitriev is idealized and mythologized in the Chuvash historiography (Boiko 2013) while Arsenii Izorkin became known as a historian of the Chuvash national newspapers, magazines and intellectual traditions and was interested in the Chuvash national movement history and in the 1990s Izorkin was one of the leading authors in the Chuvash nationalist journals and newspapers. Izorkin obtained only a degree of Candidate of historical sciences while Vasilii Dimitriev was formally a more significant and influential figure in Chuvash academic community since he was a Doctor of historical sciences and in formalized scientific hierarchy occupied more advantageous positions. Moreover, Arsenii Izorkin was just a well-known historian and journalist whereas during the Soviet period from 1968 to 1988, Vasilii Dimitriev headed the Research Institute of Language, Literature, History and Economics established within the structure of the Council of Ministers of Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Boiko 2000; Ivanov 2011). Vasilii Dimitriev's position in the Institute after his conversion to

Chuvash State Institute of Humanities remained influential and significant and he became one of the most authoritative, mythologized and idealized historians in Chuvashia. Meanwhile, Arsenii Izorkin belonged to the Chuvash historians who suggested the revision of Soviet historical narratives (Izorkin 1997a, 1997b, 1999a). For example, Izorkin critically evaluated and interpreted Soviet historiography, especially the works focused on the inclusion of the Chuvash territories into the Russian state which in the 1990s became one of the central topics of Chuvash intellectuals' debates and discussions.

The existence or non-existence of Chuvash historical time was among the central topics of historiographic debates. The supporters and representatives of neo-Soviet historiography believed that Chuvashia voluntarily joined the Russian state while the history of Chuvashia in Kazan Khanate was imagined as a history of national oppression. In this version of the sovietized and loyal Chuvash historical perception the Tatars were presented as universal anti-heroes and oppressors while the Russians were idealized as emancipators. The attempts of a radical revision of this theory were made in the 1990s and 2000s. Arsenii Izorkin was among the Chuvash historians and intellectuals who tried to propose a radically new version of national history. He decisively abandoned the old ideologized views of the inclusion of the Chuvash territories in Russian state and argued this was a violent act. Vasilii Dimitriev officially disapproved this approach and in his numerous articles (Dimitriev 2000–2001) tried to develop and maintain the Chuvash national and state identity; yet, he did it in his own unique fashion.

The ideological and methodological discussions and debates between Arsenii Izorkin and Vasilii Dimitriev are irrelevant to the general focus of the present paper. However, we are interested in Izorkin – Dimitriev active debates with respect to manipulations with history and historical memory. Arsenii Izorkin actually tried to reconsider the concept of historical time based on an idealized Chuvash factor in history. The attempts and desires to revise the idea of a voluntary incorporation of the Chuvash territories into the Russian state in fact were aimed at presenting the Chuvash nation as an equal actor of historical process. On the one hand, Izorkin tried to revive the concept of the Chuvash historical time within the

Chuvash-centered framework; on the other hand, he proposed a different interpretation of the Kazan Khanate history.

The Soviet historians preferred to promote a negative and also unattractive image of Kazan Khanate which was presented as an exclusively Tatar state where other ethnic and religious groups were oppressed by the Tatar feudal lords. Arsenii Izorkin believed that this concept was ideologized and incorrect while Vasilii Dimitriev strongly disagreed and stated that his opponent's ideas were unproven. Dimitriev accused Izorkin of idealization of the Tatar history in general and the history of Kazan Khanate in particular and insisted that Kazan Khanate was the Tatar feudal state and he also strongly disagreed with the attempts to present it as a common state of the Tatars, Chuvash, Mari, Udmurt and other ethnic and religious groups. In the early 2000s, Vasilii Dimitriev criticized Arsenii Izorkin of Chuvash nationalism, yet he preferred to point out that his opponent was aware of the historical data of the sixteenth century. Vasilii Dimitriev's and Arsenii Izorkin's concepts were based on diametrically opposite perceptions of the phenomena of the 'past' and 'future' and historical time.

The interpretations of the role and place of the Chuvash nation in this context were diametrically different and even opposite. Izorkin was inclined to write the history of the Chuvash Republic as a Chuvash history within national framework. Therefore, Izorkin considered the Chuvash nation as the main actor and participant of the historical process; however, he revived the category of 'Chuvashness' in the context of historical time. Vasilii Dimitriev followed an absolutely opposite approach and was inclined to write a history of Chuvashia in the Russian shadow. These pro-Soviet and pro-Russian preferences led to marginalization of the Chuvash history which seemed to have lost its self-sufficient value and was reduced to a regional version of the Russian history. Despite these significant discrepancies and contradictions, Izorkin and Dimitriev were Chuvash nationalists: in the 1990s, Arsenii Izorkin was a consistent nationalist while Vasilii Dimitriev was a moderate Chuvash nationalist. The problems of Chuvash history, debated by Arsenii Izorkin and Vasilii Dimitriev, were re-actualized by the Chuvash intellectuals in the 2010s.

**...MORE THAN DYSTOPIA...
THE CHUVASH IDENTITY IN TRANS-CULTURAL
SITUATION**

In the twentieth century the Chuvash identity developed as simultaneous coexistence and interaction between two mutually exclusive tendencies of continuity and discontinuity. On the one hand, Şeşpël Mişşi's poetry could be idealized, mythologized, politicized, ideologized, and recognized as the starting point for the development of the Chuvash Soviet literature. On the other hand, despite the apologetics and idealization of the first modern Chuvash poet his immediate successors, the poetic and ideological heirs failed to willingly, freely, and openly combine social and national narratives and also to propose images of the Chuvash national future.

The political repressions in the second half of the 1930s substantially and significantly weakened and undermined cultural and intellectual potentialities of the Chuvash intelligentsia. The Soviet national policy was generally reduced to a complete and coherent Sovietization of intellectual landscapes in the autonomous republics; the ideological and cultural dictates of Moscow dominated throughout while the method of socialist realism was recognized as a universal paradigm for development of literature. The central political elites failed to fully and completely Russify the Soviet republics and to completely destroy national languages despite all the efforts and attempts to assimilate them; thus, the representatives of the party elites were forced to put up with the existence of the Ukrainian, Latvian, Moldovan, and Georgian national cultures and literatures. The Soviet communist elites met with failure in the Soviet republics; still in the interior regions of the autonomous republics of the RSFSR they gained revenge since they succeeded to significantly limit opportunities for cultural and intellectual maneuvers for the national intellectual communities, including the Chuvash one.

The central elites' policy institutionalized numerous cultural and intellectual gaps and failures in the development of national cultures and literatures. The bright and eventful years of dynamic cultural and literature development, active rise and progress of national languages were followed by periods of stagnation and Russification. The national intellectual communities of the autonomous re-

publics responded in different ways, but their representatives generally preferred to resist passively. The policy of cultural and ideological unification, initiated by Moscow, on the one hand, prevented the emergences and development of some literary genres in national literatures of the autonomous republics. On the other hand, the ideological curators from Moscow actually institutionalized the cultural failures in the development of the Chuvash literature. Thus, *Şeşpël Mişši* can be considered as the first Chuvash modernist and futurist, the first author of utopia and dystopia in the Chuvash literature, but one can hardly find his successors and heirs among the twentieth-century Chuvash writers. The history of the Chuvash literature in the canon of socialist realism can be considered as a failure between poetical experimentations of *Şeşpël Mişši* and cultural activities of the Chuvash writers of the generation that came to literature in the 1980s.

This is an extremely difficult task to find utopian and dystopian elements in the Chuvash literature of the late twentieth century. Boris Cheendykov is among outstanding figures in the history of contemporary Chuvash literature, but the utopian and dystopian motives have never been emphasized in his texts. Some elements of utopian or anti-utopian self-consciousness can be traced in Boris Cheendykov's most controversial work *Hăysene hăysem vĕleresşĕn surăhsem* [*Sheep that want death*] (Cheendykov 2009b, 2012). One can hardly define this story written actually in the 1980s as utopian in conventional sense. The text is full of numerous motifs of native culture and pagan perception of the world and reality. The image of death is one of the central in the story.

It was winter and it was cold. My wife died in one of clear and frosty nights, and I was alone. I occasionally went to a big club in the village center... I played cards, smoked a lot, sometimes drank, but women did not attract me. I went up to the attic at midnight and head bowed, sat next to the dead body of my beloved, and I kissed her several times. She, of course, was only a corpse, but her hair for some reason, seemed to me still alive. I looked at her for a long time... She was probably cold, and only in order not to frighten me, she did not talk about it. Every time I came down from the attic sad and taciturn. The mind and my heart were

dried up, and I could not sleep... I got up and was sitting in the back of the hut... I was painting on the whitewashed furnace polygons, circles... I was drawing and wiping them (Cheendykov 2009b: 15).

Häysene häyse vėleresšėn surăhsem is not a classical utopia or dystopia since the action takes place not in an ideal imagined world of the future, but is set in the Chuvash agrarian and rural periphery without any concrete and determined historical origins and roots. The main character's imagined world in this story is lost in time, or still exists at the threshold between times, spaces, and epochs. The cemetery is imagined as one of the emblematic memory places in *Häysene häyse vėleresšėn surăhsem*.

Soon I got tired of such a life, and I wrapped the body on the couple veil... I harnessed it by an old, lame mare and went to ancient cemetery where long ago no one was buried. All day long I shoveled snow and picking the frozen ground. Only in the evening the grave was ready and I said goodbye forever to my beloved. At night I stumbled home, wept, and buried my head in the pillow, and forgot in a dream (Cheendykov 2009: 16).

The text of *Häysene häyse vėleresšėn surăhsem* is multi-faceted, multi-level and extremely controversial. The allegorical descriptions of necrophilia were not described as a biological act, but they were represented as an intellectual form of existence of the Chuvash community in the situation of identity crisis. The scenes of necrophilia in this story represent the attempts to return to ethnic and traditional roots and archaic culture, a desire to give up our time and to break with traditions of contemporary consumerism. Therefore, the main character chooses a strategy based on a compromise with an old faith as a natural and inevitable form of religion. This identity choice helped the anonymous and unnamed character of *Häysene häyse vėleresšėn surăhsem* to understand and realize that

Sometimes sheep kill themselves. The sheep want to die. The sheep, who do not understand what they are – just lie down and die. Apparently, these sheep are incredibly fond of white light, and their souls are similar to a human soul (*Ibid.*: 19).

The utopia and dystopia in the Chuvash literature, its cultural and intellectual traditions of the twentieth century developed discretely. Şeşpël Mişşi predicted utopia and dystopia as two different dimensions of the future ideal and idealized world. The utopian and anti-utopian motifs co-existed in Şeşpël Mişşi's legacy, but they were focused on national Chuvash futurum. The imagined coordinates of this ideal world of utopia in the Chuvash poetry of Şeşpël Mişşi can be defined as a part of mentally futurum because they were imagined just as part of future in general. Boris Cheendykov's prose defines other possible utopian and anti-utopian elements in the Chuvash identity. Being a postmodernist, Boris Cheendykov rejected to localize characters in space and time since he believed that the world develops as a world without time and space, as an imagined world-phantom and frontier without clear boundaries.

In Boris Cheendykov's prose the boundaries between death and life, being and non-being, existence and non-existence, paganism and Christianity are imagined, invented, mapped, and localized on the mental maps of identity and appear to be vague, fuzzy, and blurred. Therefore, the utopian and dystopian events from Boris Cheendykov's texts with the same probability could happen at other times and places – in the past, present or future. Boris Cheendykov breaks and deconstructs the firm and strict connotations between utopia and dystopia in an abstract futurum. His utopian prose can be considered as a prose with a reverse direction, and this structural feature is generally characteristic for the Chuvash identity after the Chuvash intellectuals had faced significant challenges of self-imagination and invention of national identity. These difficulties from purely hypothetical viewpoint could encourage the development of science fiction, utopia and dystopia genres in Chuvash literature but this scenario of transformations of the Chuvash identity remained unrealized.

The attempts to develop science fiction in Chuvash literature were made during the Soviet period, but the Chuvash prose fiction writers were too much wrapped up in the formal and ceremonial robes of socialist realism like a restless prisoned patient in a strait-jacket. The Chuvash intellectuals brought national, folkloric and ethnographic covers from the dusty storerooms of the Chuvash

identity in the post-Soviet period to the light of the day. These non-optimistic assumptions reinforce the pessimistic predictions that the 'patient' known as the formalized Chuvash science fiction will pass away soon. The utopian and anti-utopian trends in Chuvash twentieth-century national and cultural identity were coercively and violently deconstructed, marginalized and displaced beyond the cultural and intellectual space. Therefore, any attempts of the historians who study the Chuvash identity and nationalism as well as the Chuvash intellectuals' collective desires to map and revise the national identity into a concept of futurum will be only the attempts to reconstruct the elements and trends of the utopian and dystopian self-consciousness in the Chuvash identity.

THE 'PAST' AND 'FUTURE' IN THE GRAND NARRATIVES OF OFFICIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

The grand narratives are developed as a dominant form of the contemporary official Chuvash historiography including the folk history reconstructions and works (Yenykka 2012) for mass consumption among the Chuvash children. The Chuvash Republic needed a legitimation so the local elites tried to use history for consolidation of national identity. The great and generalized versions of history are important in the context of national unity since they propose positive and attractive images of national history and the past which could strengthen and consolidate the Chuvash nation as an imagined community. Today the Chuvash Republic is not an exception from the universal logic of nationalism and national identity.

The history of Chuvashia during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods was employed as an effective tool for consolidating and strengthening of the national memory; however, the mechanisms of historical memory remain unclear since in modern Chuvashia the government's quasi-official versions of identity develop within a restricted and predominantly conservative framework. The universities and academic research institutions established in Chuvashia since the Soviet period support the official historiographical discourse. The great narratives in modern Chuvash historiography support its status as a predominantly normative historiography. The ancient, medieval and modern histories of Chuvashia in official historiography (Boyko 2001, 2009) are analyzed and studied with-

in the framework of mostly and predominantly event-political paradigm. This version of the Chuvash history was accepted by the regional ruling political elites as the only true and correct. In this situation it is natural that the preface to the history of Chuvashia was written by Nikolai Fedorov (2001), the President of the Chuvash Republic. The event-related history in this historiographical context intersects with ethnographic studies (Ivanov 2009).

The medieval history is overloaded with narratives supporting the state and ethno-political myth of a continuity between the Chuvash groups inhabiting historical and contemporary territories of the Chuvash Republic. These narratives also establish the continuity between different phases and periods of the Chuvash history. Meanwhile, the list of topics and issues of the standardized historiography is rather narrow and extremely limited since the modern Chuvash historians involved and engaged in historical studies prefer the framework of predominantly linear political, event, state, social and economic history. The great synthetic alternatives of the Chuvash history, written and proposed after 1991, contain numerous intrinsic faults of the post-Soviet pattern of historical knowledge which used to be extremely ideology-driven. The main directions of their transformations are rather conventional while its methodological status is conditional and imagined. This alternative of historiography depends on political and ideological environment. The Chuvash official historiography of the post-Soviet period failed to update the frameworks for history writing; besides, the Chuvash historians also failed to provide efficient patterns for the Chuvash history-writing.

In the contemporary Chuvash historiography the images of the 'past' and 'future' have no independent value for the modern Chuvash historians who prefer to write the history of Chuvashia as a part of a greater discourse of linear history. The informal or formal principles of the 'past in the future' or 'future in the past' are widely used by the former Soviet Chuvash historians and intellectuals. While during the Soviet period the national history used to be ideologically banned as politically incorrect and was often reduced to the pre-history of the October Revolution thus allowing the Soviet historians to create futuristic dimensions of history and reduce it to the roots of communist future, the historiography in contemporary

post-Soviet Chuvashia develops within a similar intellectual environment and with similar approaches being still popular.

Meanwhile, the contemporary historians have abandoned the concept of history of Chuvashia as a history that started after October 1917. Instead, they propose a new paradigm for history-writing based on a collective perception of the past as the prehistory of the Chuvash state and statehood. In the late 1990s, some Chuvash historians, including Arsenii Izorkin (1997, 1999) and Evgeniy Pogodin (1999) tried to critically revise the principles of history writing and proposed a new concept of the Chuvash history as a national history but their attempts failed, thus, the methodological approaches, theoretical foundations, roots and backgrounds of the Chuvash history remained the same and unchanged. Therefore, time, landscape and space, 'the past in the future' and 'the future in the past' are of little interest and attraction for the conservative Chuvash historians. These issues are analyzed predominantly by the nationally-oriented intellectuals and the Chuvash historians who tend to apply a multidisciplinary approach. They are not affiliated with official state academic institutions in the Chuvash Republic which are predominantly of practical importance and reproduce an official historiographical discourse.

The concepts of national history that actualize the 'past' and 'future' narratives are not developed within contemporary official history. The Chuvash historians of the 2000s and 2010s have departed from the concept of national history and now develop an alternative version of history as a state history of the Chuvash Republic. In the 2010s the official version of history-writing gained dominant positions and the principles of communist loyalty were substituted by the myths of the Chuvash moderate political nationalism. The Soviet history of Chuvashia within this methodological approach lost its independent value. Historical imagination in the post-Soviet Chuvash historiography became a prehistory of transformation of the Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as an incomplete and flawed form of Soviet autonomy into Chuvash SSR which was later replaced by the Chuvash Republic in Russian Federation. The contemporary Chuvash official historiography is inclined to mechanically reproduce the 'past' and 'future' narratives in historical imagination where they were replaced by

the primitive mechanics of chronologically ordered events and socio-economic changes.

Modern Chuvash historians are not interested in the analysis of theoretical foundations and historical time issues. They presume to focus on other issues and subjects that consolidate the society and serve the ruling elites' political interests. This is not the case only with the Chuvash historians; yet, the Chuvash historiography in this context is characterized by politically-orientated preferences and it influences the main vectors of transformation of the humanities in modern Chuvashia. This situation also leads to the fragmentation of the Chuvash intellectual landscape. The supporters of radical historical epistemology and predominantly post-modernist interdisciplinary synthesis propose different perceptions of historical time to actualize the 'past' and 'future' narratives in the Chuvash historical imagination and identity.

THE POST-SOVIET CHUVASH IDENTITY AND THE PROBLEM OF TIME

The general incompleteness of chronological time and categories of the 'past' and 'future' are still evident in the texts of contemporary Chuvash intellectuals. Atner Huzangaj was among the Chuvash authors who succeeded to express the intellectual conditions prevailing among the Chuvashes. He proclaimed the outset of 'twilight period and twilight state of mind' (Huzangaj 1997). However, Boris Cheendykov's story 'Häysene häysem vëleresšën surähsem' (Cheendykov 2009b, 2012) has been hardly studied except for a brief review article (Savelyeva 2012) whereas it represents a typical manifestation of the above-analyzed dominating trends in the Chuvash intellectual discourse. In his story Cheendykov touches upon the issues of death and sets the question of continuity and discontinuity between different generations of the Chuvashes as well as between various forms and dimensions of the Chuvash historical past and future. The story cannot be unequivocally and categorically defined as a futuristic one since it comprises a predominantly post-modern connotations and parallels, and yet can be generally attributed to the Chuvash futuristic discourse based on the 'past' and 'future' reflections.

Boris Cheendykov developed these ideas in his later play *Dinner after Midnight* [Şurşēr hişşānhi apatlanu] (Cheendykov 1992). In this play the image of death, intertwined with national narratives, acted as an incarnation of the past. The text of this play correlates with earlier ideas of the national Chuvash project proposed by Şeşpĕl Mişşi. Artur, one of the leading characters, argues about general uncertainty and mixed character of historical times in the Chuvash identity:

...the hideous, ugly and unbearable times have come... dreary autumn days... I want to forget for a moment and escape to the far-away world of dreams... there is nobody in this world ... nature, flowers and grass, sky, earth, and river as wide as Atāl will be there with you... the sun is not too far... but you will never reach the sun, a poor Chuvash ... will never reach... fly, fly to the sun ... to the great sun, to the Yellow Days Land... you will reach the sun and You will melt ... but it is better to thaw than to live like this... turn to the light, to native land... (Cheendykov 1997)

The issues of uncertain development of the Chuvash identity are also presented in Boris Cheendykov's other texts, for example, in his short story 'The Return of Khan' (Cheendykov 2005). One should say that post-Soviet and neo-Soviet realities generally co-exist with different and uncertain scenarios of development and transformation. In this short story the neo-Soviet characters like Kazimir Petrovich can drink 'Cognac from the former Soviet and now brotherly Turkic Azerbaijan' (Cheendykov 2005: 453) and at the same time they found themselves in a trans-cultural situation of 'sovereign Yerland in Great Russia': a republic is ruled by the former communist functionaries and officials who are eager to introduce in school curricula the elements of nationalistic ideology which they used to prohibit before. The trans-cultural situation is also expressed in 'the robe embroidered with gold runic script and signs of ancient ancestors' (Cheendykov 2009a). Boris Cheendykov's story becomes a mental form of anxiety and concern about the development of the Chuvash language and identity in post-Soviet Chuvashia. The text of 'The Return of Khan' updates the trans-boundary and trans-temporal status of the contemporary Chuvash identity developed between the Turkic world and post-

Soviet realities of modern Russia where political elites continue to persistently ignore national peculiarities in the regions. Boris Cheendykov developed these ideas in his lecture delivered in 2012 in the summer camp of Chuvash public organization 'Haval' when he stated

I lead a quiet life now, I do not write anything. It does not mean that I do not want to write, but I do not know how to write and for whom. Of course, I would like to write something else, at least a couple of works, but God knows how this can happen... I do not want to write bad texts, because when you write something it has to be interesting firstly for *you*... and if it is not interesting... I think that such texts are unnecessary (Cheendykov 2012).

The similar ideas among the Chuvash intellectuals resulted from the changes and transformations of the Chuvash identity in the post-global era. The Chuvash identity, as well as other national identities, reacts in an extremely sharp and nervous way to the threats of globalization. The Chuvash intellectuals, including outstanding novelist and playwright Boris Cheendykov sadly state that

You probably often see girls in the Chuvash national costumes at official meetings on the photographs from the public site cap.ru, but there is nothing in the soul in these costumes... they are used usually to hide the nothingness... it would be much better if the Chuvashes wore American clothes, shorts, shirts, but would talk in Chuvash. This disease can be diagnosed as ornamentalism... and I do not know how to recover from it (Cheendykov 2009a).

In this context Boris Cheendykov draws parallels between post-modern Chuvash cultural identity and Western world. Several decades earlier the latter entered the era of post-national development when national identities transformed into a single element among other fragmented and deconstructed components of the great versions and forms of collective memory, ideas and representations about ideal 'grand narratives' of the national past which in previous historical epochs had effectively consolidated and united nations and also proposed universal values of political citizenship and ethnic identity for them. The combination of pessimism with

optimism and of futuristic impulses with trends to restore archaic ethnicity substantially influences the development of the concept of time within the Chuvash identity. The concept of 'death' in modern Chuvash identity has futuristic connotations; thus, the Chuvash artist Gennadiy Issaev believes that

we should either disappear from the face of the earth, or
take on the path leading to the Future (in Yakovlev 1999).

The same ideas and mood are also characteristic for Yakku Yuri texts (see in Yakovlev 1999). The image of death turns from a final point into a starting one in the movement to the future. The images of death in the contemporary post-modern Chuvash identity turned death into a category beyond historical time and balancing between the historical past and futuristic future. The combination of time and chronological boundaries as well as a reinterpreted concept of 'time' in general are characteristic for the Chuvash intellectual tradition. The genesis of this intellectual approach is too controversial and debatable and its origins can be related to the historical experience of the Chuvash nation that was forced to live in the non-Chuvash cultural environment for a long time. The Chuvash collective ideas and perception of time and landscape emerged and developed in a close correlation with other cultures and with a considerable delay.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Summing up the assumptions about different perceptions of historical time Chuvash nationalism and identity, the author believes that the main ideas and conclusions of this article can be formulated in the following way. The Chuvash perception of historical time coincided with the development of the Chuvash nationalism developed among projects that contributed to strengthening and modernization of the Chuvash identity, promoted its transformation from the traditional identity of pre-modern agrarian communities into that of a nation-state. The Revolution of 1917 in nationalist perception was nationalized and reinvented as the Chuvash national revolution and integral element of the Chuvash national historical project and local perception of historical time. The Chuvash intellectuals' speculative ideas about historical time in this framework was a sort

of national modernism, culturally and intellectually based on the attempts to spiritually legitimize the forced and extremely violence Soviet model of political modernization via a radical destruction of old and archaic, predominantly peasants partly Christian and partly pagan mixed religious backgrounds of an old Chuvash pre-modern identity.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the political and ideological dynamics of the Soviet cultural and literature landscape hardly supported successful debates on the Chuvash historical past. The re-discovery of Chuvash time as invented tradition became possible in the 1980s – the 1990s when the Chuvash nationalism was on its rise. In the twentieth century the Chuvash perception of historical time developed in the form of a retrospective modernism based on the old, archaic and historical identities, their idealization, glorification of the Chuvash national archaic history, its invention in the Chuvash national framework. In the Soviet Union the Chuvash intellectuals had a few opportunities to realize their political ambitions and tried to find a symbolic salvation in nationalization of history. The ideal future and futuristic world of the Chuvash intellectual landscape in the Soviet Chuvash version of futurism were mentally mapped and localized in the past. The Chuvash national futurism in the post-Soviet era continued to evolve as a retrospective futurism based on reflections, discussions, battles and debates about failed and missed opportunities, dreams and ideals of the Chuvash national movement. In the early twenty-first century the national pessimism got a systemic character in the existential angst of the Chuvash national identity-makers and proponents.

The Chuvash nationalism was characterized by a relatively slow historical dynamics; thus, the Chuvash nation was created rather late in comparison with other European nations. The delayed institutionalization of cultural contexts of the Chuvash nation contributed to the formation of a unique concept of time. Besides, the Chuvash cultural and literature context was formed and developed in the absence of independent Chuvash statehood so the Chuvash intellectuals have with a considerable delay entered the developmental stages of the European culture that other nations experienced in the nineteenth century. The Chuvash versions and forms of romanticism, sentimentalism, and realism emerged later than in

other European cultures. This situation provided the conditions for a more active and dynamic development of other cultural trends of modernism and futurism. In the Chuvash intellectual and cultural discourse the collective representations and debates on the past were formed not during the great historical stages of romanticism or realism. Moreover, modernism with its focus on futurism was not based on the reflections and speculations about glorious past yet just this cultural trend has formed the Chuvash collective 'past' and 'future' ideas. The reflections about future were of primary importance in this intellectual environment, and the formation of history and concepts of the past and historical time were proposed and developed with a considerable chronological delay.

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