



## The Revolt of 1916. The flight of Kyrgyz people to China

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**Abstract.** The revolt of 1916 is one of the pages in the history of Kyrgyz people, who had to overcome so many challenges, and which deserves paying a particular attention. I. Arabaev Kyrgyz State University organized a scientific research expedition devoted to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this revolt. So, the main resources for this article are the materials gathered during this expedition-oral testimonies of the Kyrgyz inhabitants living in the village Kok-Terek of Tekesoodan of Ile-Kazakh oblast, in Shaty village of Mogul-Kuroodan, in Nylky village administratively referring to Kulja city, and the archives.

**Keywords:** the year of 1916, revolt, three urkuns, emigration, Chinese Kyrgyz (i.e. Kyrgyz living in China)

### I. INTRODUCTION

Kyrgyz lived in the territories of Xinjiang from the earliest times. These areas known in the historical evidences as “Serika”, “Kashgaria”, “Eastern Turkestan”, “Western krai”, “Chinese Turkestan” were inhabited by Kyrgyz.

In the historical resource of “Yuan-Shy” it was narrated on movement of one part of the Yenisei Kyrgyz to the North-East of Heilunxiang (Hyluunxian) at the end of XIIIth century. (Suuprunenko G.V., 1960, 67) (these Kyrgyz are to be referred to Fu -Yu Kyrgyz). As for Kyrgyz living in Xinjiang, they were forcefully resettled in Orkoshaar area territorially (or administratively) belonging to Tarbagatai. After the resettlement they were subjected to the influence of the religion of local *kalmaks* – Lamaism. (KudaibergenKiyke, 2002, Huitun, p.5).

Such an assimilation of Kyrgyz lasted until mid of XVIIIth century. Kyrgyzs living in Lobnor could be also included to them. (Asankanov A.A. 2010, p.56).

In the 50’s of XVIIIth century Kyrgyz of Eastern Turkestan were accessed to Qin-Empire, and “Xinjiang” political and administrative structure appeared. And based on the “Beijing Treaty”, Russian-Chinese Tarbagatai border treaty” and Sino-Russian Ili Treaty the Kyrgyzs referred to both Russian and Chinese empires. As of this times the Kyrgyz took out citizenship of China became known in Kyrgyz history as Chinese Kyrgyz. As a matter of fact, the relationships between Russian Kyrgyz and Chinese Kyrgyz continued as before. (AnvarBaitur, 1991, p.119). For instance: after the outbreak of the World War I when the tsarist government increased its taxation and being heavily abused by the Russian resettlement policy of Russian peasants to the lands of Kyrgyz, Kyrgyz began moving to the China already in the years of 1914-1915. However, this movement was not of mass character, not more than just one tribe or a few families moved. (AsanakunMukan, MukhtarOmurbek). And during the revolt of 1916, Kyrgyz reached up to Kakshaal, Uchturpan, Aksuu, Bai, Kucha, Tekes and Kulja cities. Most of the Kyrgyz refugees came back after the establishment of the Soviets, and the rest remained in China (AnvarBaitur, 1992, p.90).

After the establishment of the Soviet power, the emigration of Kyrgyz to China did not stop. The next stage of movements took place in 1920-1930, when participants of “basmachi movement”, who opposed the Soviets and those who were against the collectivization in the villages and were taken as kulaks had to escape.

**The revolt of 1916. The Great Flight (known in Kyrgyz as *Urkun*) of Kyrgyz to China and troubles on the border.**

According to the Chinese Kyrgyz, among the people the stories on three urkuns of Kyrgyz to China (on “three flights” or “on three exodus of people”) in XXth century are widely spread. (JunusJumadyl, MukanbetKerim).

*Three stages of emigrations of Kyrgyz to China* in the years of 1916-1934 can be noted based on the archives and the evidences taken from Kyrgyz living in China.

Those Kyrgyz who settled in China in 1916 because of the “**Chong Urkun**” (“Great Flight”) (they also call the revolt of 1916 as “Chong urkun” or “munt”). Kyrgyz who opposed the colonial policy of Russian empire during the Revolt of 1916 had to flee to China. Chinese Kyrgyz conventionally divide urkun into chongkachkyn (or urkun), ortokachkyn (urkun) and kichikachkyn (urkun), meaning great flight, mid-flight, and small or lesser flight from Kyrgyz accordingly. Prior to telling of the year of the event, first they used to clarify in which of the urkuns – greater or lesser it took place. (AidarkanAtambek, AsanakunMukan)

Kyrgyz moved to China *usually in three directions or routes*. The first one: through Ak-sai valley of At-Bashy area in Naryn province to Torugart and Keltebek mountain pass; the second one is through the Bedel mountain passes which are to the South from Przhevalsk; the third one is through Karkyra to Kulja and Tekes directions.

According to the archives the Russian consul general reported on the routes of Kyrgyz flight to China as following: as of early September small groups of Kyrgyz appeared on the border of China. The major part of Kyrgyz approached the Chinese border from September 20th, as many of their cattle did not allow them to overcome the passes. By that time the armed forces of Russia accumulated in Jety-Suu (Semirechie oblast) resolutely began to persecute and deport the insurgents to China. Kyrgyz moved to Chinese borders in two directions: 1) through Torugart and Keltebek passes higher of Kakshaalriver via Aksai valley close to Naryn fortress and 2) through Bedel and Kaichy passes to the south from Przhevalsk city they came to Uchturpan and Aksuu. The first route was *the hardest way to move to China for large crowds* of people. Closeness of the fortress of Naryn was a serious risk for the insurgents who moved to Torugart, in addition Kyrgyz were not attracted by the border mountains there since they were unfavorable, very difficult to go over with no pastoral lands. Therefore only those Kyrgyz who used to inhabit in the southern part of Naryn moved to Chakmak through the Torugart pass prior to the revolt, a bit more than 2 volosts of Kyrgyz went there, it is also due to the fact that unrest did not take much among the Kyrgyz in Naryn area. Unlike them, the most part of the insurgents with their leaders moved via Bedel pass to Uchturpan and Aksuu, because in this direction there were many pastures and the borders and the passes were not so controlled giving the possibility for Kyrgyz to freely go to the other side as reported in the report No.3300 of December 1, 1916 by mission of the Russian empire in Beijing. Thus, Kyrgyz from 32 volosts of Pishpek and Przhevalskuezds settled in Uchturpan and Aksuu, and from 7 volosts of Jarkentuezd along with kazakhs settled in Tekes.

Kyrgyz were on the verge of starvation because of high costs of the essentials in Uchturpan and Aksuu: due to starvation such illnesses as typhoid fever and others appeared. “Because of the difficulties of the pass Kyrgyz had to leave their cattle and small children on their way, and had to sell their girls who were more than 12 – years old for 30-40 soms (at the time 1 som equaled to 3 tenge instead of 12 tenge) to local sarts.” – wrote Russian consul in Kashgar (KRIA, fund of manuscripts, inventory (hereinafter as “inv.”) No.136, p.41).

It is impossible to fully describe all the sufferings of Kyrgyz they experienced on their way and abroad. On the one hand, they were deliberately persecuted and exterminated by punitive forces, well equipped with food and supplies, on the other hand they had to overcome the coldness of the highest mountains and hunger. It was especially hard for those who went on foot, starved, small children, elderly and mothers with infants. Manaps who moved among the firsts along with their cattle, horses and camels during the beginning of urkun did not suffer so much. However, gradually the lack of feed for livestock and hardships of the passes cause to losses of their cattle in huge numbers. “The cattle losses are numbered in a thousand per day” – as reported on December 22, 1916 by one of the leaders of the punitive forces (KRIA, fund of manuscripts, inv. No.137, p.186-187). He continues in his report that Ak-Bel and Bedel passes, and Kelek-Taigakriver and around Ysyk-Bulak are full of the dead bodies of cattle. Also significant parts of cattle were taken off by the punitive forces. So, when the refugees reached the border they had only 10% of their horses, 25% of sheep. (K.Usenbaev, 1967, 126)

In the memories of AldashMoldoeducatee, living in “Druzhba” kolkhoz of Jety-Ogus rayon, son of AbdylArystakeuulu – participant of the revolt of 1916 who gathered the oral testimonies from the people is reported as following: “When urkun we moved to Kyzyl-Suu (Pokrovka) pass. The pass was very difficult; it was hard to see the traces of horses. Nothing is seen because of the never-ending glaciers. Sheep, goats, loaded cows and camels, horses with peoples, women with infants fell down. There in glacier one could hardly hear because of the noises standing – screaming of cattle, of children, or people on horses opposing to move further. A 40-50 meters deep. Most of the cattle of *bais* (well-to-do people) fell off the cliff. Then we had to overcome stony (not arable) passes, difficulties of cold rapid river flows,

had to put *chokoi* on the hooves of cows, camels and to eat the grass called jorgomuch because of no food". (KRIA, fund of manuscripts, inv. No.716, p.35).

Then, those who managed to cross the border were subjected to raids on the part of kalmaks, who took off cattle and women as captives. Then, local Chinese authorities forced to present the rest of the goods. It became normal practice to kill mercilessly those who opposed and to take off the belongings.

On this *Abdymoldo Bake, resident of Shaty village of Mongul-Kuroodan of Ile-Kazakh autonomous oblast of China* said the following: "Many of the refugees died on the way because of the difficulties, hunger, looting. And with all those difficulties they reached here (Chinese side). It turned out that it was difficult to pass the border too. Despite of their miserable state, they were driven back saying that you are under Russians, and they were persecuted by Russian forces, and there were many of those who died in between on the way. There a mountain pas behind Saikal which leads to Issyk-Kul, nowadays it is called as Kyrgyz-Sai and Kyrgyz-pass. When they came over here, people got dispersed and some of them reached Urumqi. It is known that on their way they had to leave their children, girls to various people, since they were not able to feed them. There were the days when they had to give their daughters in marriage in order to get oatmeal.

Should we refer then to the memories of *BeisheMady (at the age of 59) representing Saryks from Aryktribe* and living in Mongul-Kuroodan of China: "Up to nowadays the stories on 1916 are kep in Mongul-Kuro. There is a place called Kyrgyz pass. It is also called as "Plcase of Kyrgyz holocaust". Because while Urkun Kyrgyz refuged here to hide after overcoming the mountain pass, but they were chased by the Russians and on this side they were exterminated by the Chinese. Russians following back, and mongul and kalmaks on this side trapped people on the pass and exterminated. You can still find the belongings of those killed people as kazan, samoor, tulga, etc. in that Kyrgyz pass. When we graze our cattle on the pastures there is a way which can be passed only on the horses, if you go there you can still find the bones of the people and the rest of their belongings. We prayed (read Kuran) for the souls of the dead and laid to rest their bones, but there were so much of them as it is hardly possible to walk there, and one cannot bury all the noes, still the stone are kept in between the stones and brushwood" *BeisheMamy* said. (infor). And according to *MukanbetuuluAdbyshukur, resident of Kaiyndy village (mongul village of Mongul-Kuro)* " In 1973 on "Kyrgyz pass" one could not to be and to go there because of the remains of deceased and wooden remains of their yurtas, my farther used to tell me on now Kyrgyz were killed there. When they moved by 30-40 families, they tried to secure themselves with strong shooter-hunter. My farther used to tell me on the Kazakh who also lived in our village, although he had no part of his right hand, when he shot putting the gun on the shoulder, he could shoot a crow in flight. So they could pass only with the help of such master shooters. In those days Russian soldiers retreated if the shooters shot at least one of two of them. Because they also knew on the presence of the shooter-hunter. Refuged people followed the shooter, so he was in front of the refugees. They could pass only shooting back those who chased them" – he said.

According to the information of May1, 1917, about 70-87 thousands of those who moved to Southern Turkestan were in miserable and desperate conditions. Hundreds of thousands of exterminated people could not stay for a longer time abroad, with no rights and being persecuted. So they had no way but appeal to the Russia's representatives in Sourthen Turkestan. In the appeal of Kyrgyz insurgents written to the Russian consul in Kulja: "At present we have no food, shelter and forage for our horses... We have no bread and salt. Please inform the heads on our condition: perhaps there is a possibility to help us."- they appealed. IN his report of December 1, 1916 the Russian consul in Kashgar wrote: "...driven to such extremes Kyrgyz are willing and show a desire to go back to Russia" – he notified. Governor-general of Semirechie oblast wrote: "...refugees and kara-kyrgyzs soon sent their representatives to Naryn with the notice of obedience and request to allow them to come back to our territories" (KRUIA, inv.No. 256, p.68). But Tsar's government put forward inexecutable conditions. Thus, it was demanded that they give up their leaders and arms, that each volost deliver 200 horses and compensate all losses. These conditions were an impasse and did not give hopes to the people who were in desperate. Those who pursued the colonial policy of the Russian empire aimed at fully seizure of kyrgyz lands.

The social condition of the Kyrgyz who found refuge in China can be divided into three categories. The first one: 10% of those who had cattle from 50 to 200; the second one: 20% of mid-layers having cattle from 5 to 10; third one makes 45% of workhands or hirehands. In addition there those women and girls who were sold for a bit of bread, some of them were reported as sold for sexual services to Shanghai, Wuxiang, and other cities of China. (KRIA, inv.No.45, p.61-66)

Indeed, the socio-economic condition of the locals in their own motherland was also hopeless. The Russian Tsar's administration conducted the following policy towards the local indigenous population:

1. Under the pretext of compensation of the losses during the revolt to take contribution<sup>1</sup>;
2. By the decision of governor-general Kuropatkin there were established in every used the special committees and divisions for statistics (to take the payments).

On October 21, 1916 "The oblast Committee to identify the losses and gather payments" started its operation. According to the calculations of this Committee just the contribution in the amount of 30 mln.roubles was imposed to the locals. Thus, every village had to pay huge amounts of money. On October 16, 1916 at the special meeting held in Vernyand chaired by Kuropatkin by the resolution No.59 on eviction of Kyrgyz who took part in the revolt of 1916 was decided as:

1. To seize 2510361 *desyatins* of lands of local population in Pishpek, Przhevalsk and Jarkentuezds based on the statistical data of P.P.Rumyantsev and to evict Kyrgyz and Kazakhs from their lands in Issyk-Kul, Tekes river, Karkyra pastureland, Chu river.
2. To establish 5 kazakstanitsa, each having 60 households on the southern and Northern shores of Issyk-Kul lake, the places indicated as: 1. Oruktu. 2. Korumdu. 3. Dungans' settlement – Mariinsk, 4. Around former Russian settlement Gogolevka. 5. Ulakhol. The rest of the places suitable for settlement to be populated exclusively by Russians, and the areas so far unsuitable for occupancy to be transferred to the Treasury of Russia!
3. To move the Kyrgyz from Przhevalskuezd and part of Pishpekuezd to Naryn. According to statistical data and monitoring of P.P.Rumyantsev. in Naryn 57 126 *desyatins* are arable lands. 46 288 *desyatins* – hay lands, 1 836 309 – winter cabin, 2 815 400 – summer grazing, in total there would be 4 755 122 *desyatins* of lands,"- as written (Minutes No.59 of October 16(29), 1916. KUIA. Fund of manuscripts, inv. No.256, p.159)

By the resolution it was also decided in addition to resettling of Kyrgyz from Przhevalsk and Pishpekuezds to Narynuezd, to settle Kyrgyz from Sarybagysh and Atakevolosts in other far-reaching volosts or villages to *resettle in Balkhash*. This resolution meant: first of all, to deport all insurgents and refugees from their motherland to China; secondly, to forcibly move 200 000 Kyrgyz and Kazakh to far areas. On November 8, 1916 Kuropatkin in Kazalinsk (since 1874 the centre of Ural oblast) raised the issue of settlement of 7 thousand Ural-kazaks in Issyk-Kul. He agitated to seize the lands of Kyrgyz for the kazaks of Ural. Kyrgyz appealed in the letter to S.P.Mansyrev – deputy of Russian Duma (Apparently, local people appealed since they used to know him as working for a long period as Tax inspector in Turkestan). The deputies in Duma, taking into account the appeal of Kyrgyz, immediately urged Kuropatkin not to take any decision. The Deputies of State Duma accused D.S. Shuvaev, war minister in abuse of his authorities and in making unauthorized decision. However, D.S. Shuvaev responded as "I know better how to use the powers given to men. That was a response from the authorities. It was planned to move Kyrgyz in a short time, i.e. by March 1917. In December 1916, Minister of Agriculture made some changes to the plan of Kuropatkin. It prescribed: "to clean-up Sonh-Kol, Jungal and Kokomeren areas from local population under pretext of the necessity to construct water reservoirs." (RVIA, ph. 7198, No.87, d.42. ch.3)

The properties taken off from Kyrgyz were sold in auction and the incomes were transferred to the deposit of the military governor. "Seize the lands where Kyrgyz took part in the Revolt"- governor-general Kuropatkin instructed. (Circular of Folbaum, the governor-general in Semirechie to all the heads of uezds. September 3 (16), 1916. KR KUIA, inv.No.258, p.17).

All the villages from Verny to Pishpek, and from Pishpek to Issyk-Kul were totally depopulated. According to the report of Folbaum of 1916,"over 300 000 cattle has been accumulated from the Kyrgyz fleeing from Przhevalsk area to China. And in Kochkor we took off 100 000 cattle. The same we did in Tokmok. The next to be are Jungal, Alabel which is to the east of Kochkor. (S.Brainin. Sh.Shapiro, 1936, p.105) – he wrote. Punitive "expedition forces" followed (chased) Kyrgyz up to the Chinese territories and robbed by force. In Uch-Tupankazakdivision headed by starshinaBychkov stood out for atrocities (S.Brainin, Sh.Shapiro, 1936, p.108). Kyrgyz fled to China beganto come back in spring 1917. But since early 1920 their return gradually slowed down for various political reasons. However, in 1921-1922 due to the land reforms Kyrgyz started to come back in huge numbers. But only those Kyrgyz who were able to do that returned. While talking of Kyrgyz-refugees the question may arise as "Why they did not return to their motherland when the Soviets came to power and there was a peace established?". The obstacles on the Chinese border, the movement of basmchi opposing to the Soviets impeded to the return of all Kyrgyz (who refuged) from China. Besides, many of them were subjected to atrocities of the soldiers, difficulties on the pass and got truly unwanted to go back. Thus, part of those Kyrgyz found shelter in China forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Contribution or indemnities (from latin contribution) – payments imposed on the losing country in favor of the state-winner.

The tables below clearly show the dynamics of the sharp decrease of the Kyrgyz population in Semirechie in the years of 1916-1921 due to the revolt of 1916 and the civil strife of 1918-1920.

Comparative data on the number of Kyrgyz and Kazakh families in 1916 and in 1917 (D.S.Asfendiyarov, 1936, p.104)

YEZD	Number of volosts in uezd	In 1915 –prior to the Revolt	In 1917- after the Revolt	Reduced by
Verny	3	4 347	2 415	1 932
Jarkent	13	17 096	4 378	12 718
Pishpek	25	21 831	12 518	9 313
Przhevalsk	32	34 509	8 849	25 660
Lepsinsk	5	7 071	3 629	3 442
In Total		84 854	31 789	51 065

The table shows destructiveness of the revolt of 1916 particularly in Przhevalsk, Jarkent and Pishpekuezds.

Home population (by Marco Buttino, 1990, p.69)

Uezds	in 1912	in 1915	in 1921
Jarkent	167 000	161 000	108 000
Przhevalsk	192 000	205 000	201 000
Aulie-Ata	365 000	no information	201 000
In Total	724 000	no information	510 000

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