
CONFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION REFORMS AND ITS IMPACT ON MUSLIM IDENTITY IN KAZAKHSTAN 1860-1917

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(Received 27 July 2023, revised 31 August 2023)

Abstract

The article considers the features of the reformation of education during the colonization of Kazakhstan. The study aims at comprehending the policies and practices of the Russian Empire and their consequences for the education of the Muslim population. The study proves that Christianization and Russification policies caused attempts to assimilate and control educational institutions. It is concluded that the state-confessional relations established by the Russian Empire in Kazakhstan were crucial for Muslim education. Although the Russian Empire sought to dominate the Muslim population, it faced resistance and resentment from Muslim communities. The persistence of Muslim culture and the emergence of religious reform movements were major obstacles to the goals of Russification and Christianization.

Keywords: religion, state-confessional, relations, policies, Christianization

1. Introduction

One of the significant scientific areas in the history of Central Asia regards studies on adaptation and transformation throughout the education of traditional societies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is worth paying attention to the issues related to the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in the

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sphere of confessional and national relations of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has been known for unique national and confessional diversity since it was a zone of interaction for many ethno-cultural groups. The Tatars settled down in the Kazakh steppe in the 18th-20th centuries. As the Russian Empire expanded into more territories with diverse populations, it sought to consolidate its power and impose its control over this multicultural and multi-religious environment.

Under Catherine II, there was a shift towards a policy of religious tolerance, which was perceived as a means of quickly subjugating Muslim society. The tsarist administration sent Tatar clerics to Kazakhstan, allocated funds for the construction of mosques and Madrasah colleges, and paid them salaries. Private national confessional schools became widespread. At the initial stage of colonization, the Russian administration allowed and encouraged the admission of Tatar mullahs to Kazakhstan [1-3]. In addition, attention was paid to representatives of the clergy from the indigenous population (the Kazakhs), who were supposed to support the colonial policy. Nevertheless, the tsarist government tried to Russify 'foreigners' and promoted Christian Orthodox missionary work.

These events paved the way for a complex interaction of public policy, religious dynamics and cultural assimilation. On the one hand, the Russian Empire took a position of religious tolerance and supported the preservation of Muslim institutions and customs. On the other hand, the country pursued strategies to promote the dominance of Russian culture and Orthodoxy. This dualism laid the foundation for complex state-confessional relations in the sphere of education in Kazakhstan and other regions under the influence of the Russian Empire.

The Russian Empire took measures to reduce the role of Islam and prevent its strengthening in every possible way. This was reflected in such actions as obtaining approval for spiritual activity. According to the Decree of 1848 and after appropriate checks of the applicant by the Islamic clergy, those who received spiritual education in Bukhara or Khiva were forbidden to conduct spiritual and educational activities among the Kazakhs.

Until the end of the 19th century, the education of the Kazakh people had been provided in Muslim schools and Madrasah colleges. "They represented a system of continuous education from primary to higher levels which have been evolving for centuries since the adoption of Islam." [4, p. 101]

An important role in the field of education was played by the reform of 1861. The so-called zemstvo schools emerged in the Russian Empire and became the main type of educational institution. However, zemstvos were not established in the territory of Kazakhstan and the outskirts of the Russian Empire. The prohibition on conducting spiritual and educational activities among the Kazakhs for individuals educated in Bukhara or Khiva reflected the authorities' concerns about the potential influence of external ideologies and teachings [5]. The Russian Empire sought to maintain its control over the religious narrative and prevent the spread of ideas that could challenge its authority or promote alternative visions of religious and cultural identity [6].

Teachers and educators were restricted from formal spiritual and educational roles, so they often became informal spiritual guides and mentors within their communities [7]. This gave rise to a grassroots movement of religious revivalism, with these individuals fostering a more profound connection to Islamic teachings and fostering a sense of shared religious identity.

However, at the end of the 19th century, the Russian Empire began to take measures aimed at integrating Muslims into the sociocultural environment of Russian education. The following policy documents were created: 'Rules of the Journal of the Council of the Minister of Public Education' (February 2, 1870), 'Rules for the education of Muslims and foreign Christians' (March 26, 1870), 'On Educational Measures for Foreigners Living in Russia' (1870) [8]. As a result, these policy documents had a dual effect on religious education and religiosity among Muslims in Kazakhstan. On one hand, they provided an avenue for individuals to gain exposure to Russian language and culture, enabling them to engage more effectively with society. On the other hand, they sparked discussions within Muslim communities about the balance between preserving religious and cultural heritage [9].

Therefore, in 1874, Tatar, Bashkir and Kazakh schools and Madrasah colleges began to operate in the Muslim communities of the Volga region and in the Kazakh region, in particular, the Ural and Turgay regions and in the Inner Horde [10]. According to the regulation of the State Council of November 20, 1874, educational institutions were subordinated to the Ministry of Public Education and controlled by the Educational Department.

The period at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century attracts the greatest interest of scholars. At that time, the colonial policy of the Russian autocracy strengthened, which launched active acculturation and changed and transformed the socio-cultural space of the region. The established system of religious education in Kazakhstan underwent significant reform at the beginning of the 20th century.

To consider this topic, we used the term 'state-confessional relations'. The latter are understood as a set of relationships between state institutions and confessional entities. The policy of Russification and Christianization is characterized in terms of social, economic, migration, demographic and educational processes aimed at strengthening the Russian presence in the countries that were part of the Russian Empire. The Church policy was reinforced by state support, which consisted of incentives for those who accepted Orthodoxy, including exemption from taxes and duties, centralization of power and several other measures. For example, if Muslims converted to Orthodoxy, they were exempt from taxes for three years [11].

The ideas of confessional and secular education in the Russian Empire were implemented by such scholars as N.I. Ilminsky, I. Altynsarin, I. Gasprinskii, etc. The system of education proposed by N.I. Ilminsky consisted in Christian education. The scholar proposed to organize bilingual foreign schools, publish educational and religious books in Kazakh, and train teachers from the local population [12]. We should emphasize the scientific works by I. Altynsarin

who made every effort to educate the Kazakh people [13]. S.M. Gramenitskii [14] claimed that the opening of Russian native schools in Turkestan was a mistake since there was hardly any need for Russian. In 1892, F.M. Kerensky in his work ‘The Madrasah Colleges of the Turkestan Territory’ stated, “27 years of the Russian rule passed without a trace for native schools; they alone were not affected by new beneficial orders or shed even by a weak ray of light” [15]. An important role in reforming confessional religious education was played by Tatar educator I. Gasprinskii who introduced secular disciplines into spiritual education [16]. A.I. Dobromyslov emphasized that the new method of teaching gradually penetrated the Kazakh region [17].

As a response to the challenges of that time, drastic transformations of Muslim education were required, which formed its historical, political and social context. Education helped to fulfil the requirements of a new era and served as the first step towards forming the culture of modern Central Asia.

Understanding the historical interactions of the state, various ethnic groups and religious communities is critical to comprehend the complex dynamics that have ensured Muslim education and cultural preservation in Kazakhstan. Thus, this article aims at studying the historical context, analysing the development of confessional religious education, and evaluating the state policy pursued in Kazakhstan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

2. Materials and methods

Since this article considers the transformation of confessional religious education, we selected the following research methods: historical analysis, systems analysis, civilizational approach, chronological method and historical-comparative method.

Systems analysis was based on the ability to identify phenomena in their logical sequence through the qualitative characteristics of the constituent elements of the system. The chronological approach considered the dynamic formation of spiritual education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and highlights a number of its components. The historical-comparative method was used to determine the specific and general features of reforming confessional religious education in this region. Historical events were considered in relation to the historical situation, its causes, and further development.

The research methodology also comprised a review of the existing literature, including the work of scholars who studied confessional religious education and public policy in Kazakhstan. The main material was a wide range of scientific works on the development of confessional relations in the Russian Empire, archives, and document collections.

An important aspect of the study was the works of authors who considered the colonial period of Kazakhstan and the policy of the Russian Empire for the development of Central Asian territories. These topics were covered by S.N. Abashin, A.A. Gafarov, S.I. Kovalskaya, I.K. Zagidullina, S.V. Lyubichankovskii, etc. [18].

Thus, the methods used in this study help analyse the development of confessional religious education and state policy in Kazakhstan with due regard to socio-cultural, political and historical aspects.

3. Results

As a result of the study, we described the specific features of reforms, which are clearly traced through published documents and projects of the Russian Empire. The analysis of archives and document collections emphasized the complexity of state-confessional relations and the tension that arose between the goals of cultural assimilation of the Russian Empire and the aspirations of the Muslim population.

We determined the following three stages: preparatory-organizational, main, and final.

At the first stage (the 2nd half of the 19th century), the Russian foreign policy focused on Central Asia, and the country began to absorb new territories of neighbouring Muslim countries. The Russian expansion into Central Asia intensified interaction with various ethnic and religious groups in Kazakhstan.

At the second stage (from the 1870s), active attempts at Christianization and Russification were made through the education system. In 1875, it was decided to subordinate all Russian and native educational institutions of the Turkestan region to the Ministry of Public Education. Changes in educational districts lasted until the end of the 19th century. The Turkic-speaking peoples experienced certain difficulties in the field of school education. This is due to the fact that “Russian national schools were controlled by different ministries: for example, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Volga region and Kazakhstan (Akmola, Semipalatinsk, Turgay, Ural regions), the Department of Military Affairs in Turkestan” [19]. Governor-General of Orenburg N.A. Kryzhanovskii and patron of the Kazan educational district P.D. Shestakov demanded that the native schools should be transferred to the Ministry of Public Education [20].

In 1876, the Committee of Ministers issued ‘Draft Instructions for Inspectors of Tatar, Bashkir, and Kyrgyz Schools’ signed by the tsar. The document consisted of 52 clauses. The first part is called ‘General Provisions’ and contains (§1-6) the provisions of the control department of Muslim educational institutions. The second part contains four chapters on a specific topic. Chapter One titled ‘The Inspection of Madrasah Colleges and Mekteb Schools’ (§7-21) regulated the inspector’s activities for school supervision, the duties of school directors, and the criteria for admission to the post of headmaster and teacher. Clause 18 stated that new schools and Madrasah colleges should be opened only with mandatory Russian classes since the publication of the Draft Instructions. In addition, an obligation was introduced to pay teachers an annual salary (not less than 350 rubles). Clause 20 was aimed at promoting Russian education and establishing a bilingual education system. It stated that if society or the owner of a Madrasah school openly opposed the introduction of Russian classes, this could lead to the closure of the educational

institution. To continue its activities, the founder had to undertake a written obligation to finance the Russian classes from their own funds. Consequently, if the founder wanted to preserve the national education of Muslim children, they were obliged to financially support the Russian classes. These Draft Instructions were sent to the Volga region and Siberia, i.e. provinces with a significant Muslim population.

In 1878-1879, the anti-government protests of the Tatar peasants caused by rumours of forced baptisms in the Kazan province were the result of grave mistakes of local officials. Although such protests were brutally suppressed by military force, these events caused mass unrest among the Muslims of the Middle Volga region. Realizing the deep distrust of the Muslims in public authorities and observing their dedication to protecting their religious faith, the Ministry of Internal Affairs identified local officials as the main cause of popular discontent, paid close attention to the 'Muslim problem', and asked the governors to take internal political measures to suppress resistance. When the Muslim riots were put down, it became clear that the activities of the tsarist government in the field of control over education (the latter considered an internal affair of the Muslim society) would provoke a harsh reaction. "The Muslims lost faith in the government which convinced them there would be no restrictions on their religious rights. The directive caused certain concerns about the intention of public authorities to restrict Islam and forcibly baptize Muslims." [21, p. 91]

On September 29, 1881, the reports of the Governor-General were presented at a meeting of a special department of the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Public Education. Governor-General of Orenburg N.A. Kryzhanovskii reasonably opposed the innovation. He believed that the management of national schools and Madrasah colleges based on these instructions would lead to a new wave of protests among Muslims. Kryzhanovskii criticized Article 18, which obliged the founders of Madrasah colleges to hold the Russian classes at their own expense and pay teachers a salary of at least 350 rubles a year. This rule did not consider the real demographic situation in villages and the traditions of Muslim education. There were mosques in every village, even if there were only 20-30 households. The Governor-General argued that "the requirement for such rural schools (mosque schools) to hire a Russian language teacher for 350 rubles would lead to their closure" [21, p. 94]. He even expressed his concern over the requirement to know Russian for candidates for the position of mudarris. Since teachers working in confessional religious schools were religious persons, this innovation would have caused the stagnation of Muslim education and led to the mass closure of religious schools and Madrasah colleges.

The military governor of the Turgay region stated that if the Instructions had been introduced, Madrasah colleges that were not included in the 'Temporary Regulations' of 1868 (which required only one mosque and one mullah in each volost) and mosque schools would be legalized. Although they lived secretly in the countryside and public authorities overlooked their

activities, it was superfluous to elevate the mullah to the rank of Madrasah and give him the right to manage Madrasah colleges. Therefore, the governor offered not to spread the Instructions about mosque schools and Madrasah colleges in the territory of the Turgay region.

The reports of tsarist officials on reforms in the field of education are kept in both Kazakh and Russian archives. Governor-General S. Duhovsky issued his report on October 26, 1899, where he criticized Islam. Duhovsky realized that religion formed national identity and was a dangerous source of ethnic self-awareness. A representative of the clergy sent a letter to the Governor-General and demanded to prohibit the opening of new mosques and Mekteb schools [The Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Fund 64. List 1. File 3155, 1-7].

Many reports of district heads dwell on the significant influence of Muslim Tatars and pagans on Christians in the Kazan and Orenburg educational districts. Since the Muslim influence was so great, there was a big fear that many baptized representatives of the local population would again convert to Islam and turn away from the so-called Russian world [19]. The Draft Instructions were created in response to a boycott of rural Muslim communities against the desire of the Ministry of Education to open the Russian classes. Kazan officials tried to use their power to oversee Muslim schools and promote Russian education while endowing the education department with repressive powers. In the 1880s, the government tried to distinguish between general and religious schools to integrate Muslim education [22]. The interplay between traditional Islamic teachings, the influence of new educational policies, and the broader sociocultural context created fertile ground for the deepening of theological thought among Muslim communities in Kazakhstan [23, 24].

The third stage since the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by an active discussion of Muslim education at interdepartmental special meetings. Their participants expressed different viewpoints on the management and functioning of Russian-Tatar schools and Mekteb and Madrasah colleges, reforming the latter into Jadid educational institutions.

The Ministry of Public Education held meetings in 1905 and 1910-1911, their decisions were subsequently implemented in special rules of 1906, 1907, and 1913 [25]. Their resolutions concerned new method schools and the fight against progressive Muslim teachers [26].

In April-May 1914, an interdepartmental 'Conference on the Muslim Affairs' was held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs under the chairmanship of Deputy Minister I.I. Zolotarev. Among the measures aimed at streamlining the school affairs of Muslims, public authorities put forward the following demands: a ban on the use of foreign textbooks in Mekteb schools and Madrasah colleges; non-admission of foreign teachers or persons educated abroad. Much attention was paid to the lack of approved curricula in the Tatar Mekteb and Madrasah educational institutions. In view of the above, it was difficult to regulate the position of the Muslim clergy [27].

Reforms in Muslim education caused extreme concerns for the Ministry of Public Education. “The 15 million Muslim population of Russia was undergoing a new phase of its development, striving for enlightenment and creating a new way of life that threatened the cultural identity of Russia.” [28, p. 99] P.A. Stolypin believed that Mekteb schools and Madrasah colleges “served as conductors of the Muslim culture and the Pantura Spirit” and saw certain threats in the event of reforming the Muslim world, which “could compete with the Russian culture”. Thus, he demanded to destroy the spiritual administration of Muslims and close “or transform Jadid schools into purely confessional educational institutions” [29, p. 130]. Such categorical judgments suppressed any other views and beliefs. It is worth mentioning that Stolypin was a colonial official who thought in terms of superiority common to Western culture. “These problems are particularly acute in the case of former colonial societies where the idea of Modernity was used as a discipline of dominance, impressing the superiorities of Western culture, claiming powers to control the future.” [30, p. 126]

4. Discussion

The study results are consistent with historical reports which emphasize the desire of the local population to preserve their religious and cultural identity.

Our results comply with the opinion of G.N. Potanin. The scholar claims that the ‘Muslim-clerical trend’ among the Kazakhs began to intensify, especially with the conquest of Turkestan. “Young people began to leave for Holy Bukhara, studied the Persian and Arabic languages and Muslim laws, and became mullahs upon returning to their homeland” [31, p. 295]. In our opinion, their teaching contributed to the revival of traditional religious values and practices, strengthening the religiosity of the Kazakh population [32]. A few decades ago, there were more opportunities for the penetration of European ideas into the Kazakh environment: “There were few Kyrgyz mullahs, most of them were Kazan Tatars, and the Kyrgyz mullahs, if they were, were students of the Kazan mullahs” [33, p. 395].

According to A. Kappeler, the Russian Empire practiced a ‘traditional steppe policy’ based on religious tolerance and cooperation with local elites. In relation to the new territories that entered the sphere of imperial interests, such as the North Caucasus, Central Asia, the Kazakh steppe and the Far East, the Russian Empire began to pursue a colonial policy typical of modern Europe. This policy was based on the idea of cultural and racial differences of the local population in relation to the Russians and a ‘Eurocentric sense of superiority’, therefore there was no goal of integrating the local elite into the imperial elite. Facing one national movement, the Russian Empire decided to ‘immediately preempt’ similar movements in other countries [34, p. 400].

In addition, S.I. Kovalskaya believes that “the imperial policy of acculturation was flexible, and each territory had its own characteristics. In Turkestan (Central Asia), the Russian Empire found an active religious and

civilizational foundation. Consequently, Russia was forced to reckon with traditions and be flexible, without forcing any changes” [35, p. 73]. D.V. Vasiliev emphasizes that the Russian Empire in relation to Islam pursued “a policy of tolerance, as far as it was possible in the interests of the state” [34, p. 28]. Several scholars claim that there had been feudal relations between Russia and its Muslim outskirts until 1917 [36].

According to T. Tazhibaev, there were two school systems in Kazakhstan at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. One type served the Russian people, and the other was created for the non-Russian people (Russian-Kazakh schools, rural schools, or Muslim schools) [37]. We agree that there was segregation in education but the positive effect of the development of the school system would play a key role in forming professional and pedagogical values and shaping the worldview of graduates [38].

The establishment of religious educational institutions, particularly Madrasah colleges, played a pivotal role in nurturing a more intricate understanding of theological concepts among the Kazakh population. These centres of learning provided an environment where students engaged in rigorous studies of Islamic theology, Jurisprudence and Philosophy [39]. As young scholars delved into the intricacies of Quranic interpretation, Hadith analysis, and the scholarly debates of the time, they were exposed to a rich tapestry of theological perspectives that spanned various Islamic schools of thought [40].

The segregated nature of education also fostered a distinct sense of religious identity among Kazakh students attending Muslim schools. The deepening of theological thought during this period was also influenced by the broader socio-cultural context [41]. As Kazakh society has undergone a transformation due to Russian colonial policies, the need to preserve and assert their religious and cultural identity has become a top priority.

Considering the origins of the Kazakh intelligentsia, W. Dowler indicated that there was a direct relationship between its development and the implementation of the Ilminsky system. In his opinion, this system developed national literature, which formed ethnic self-identification and encouraged the young intellectual elite to perceive modern civilization in its liberal-democratic aspects [42].

The introduction of modern pedagogical approaches and the incorporation of local languages into educational curricula were transformative steps that influenced the way theological concepts were explored and interpreted. This integration also enabled the emergence of a distinct Kazakh Islamic discourse that was rooted in local cultural contexts. The intelligentsia, comprising theologians, educators and writers, seized the opportunity to reinterpret Islamic teachings within the framework of modernity and social change [43]. This reinterpretation went beyond rote memorization of religious texts; instead, it involved critical analysis, contextualization, and the application of religious principles to contemporary challenges. The Ilminsky system’s emphasis on education as a tool for social transformation dovetailed with the deepening of theological thought. In our opinion, this endeavour gave rise to an intellectual

movement that explored ways to reconcile traditional religious values with the changing world, resulting in a more dynamic and adaptable form of religiosity.

According to P.K. Dashkovskii and E.A. Shershneva, state policy towards the Islamic community was inconsistent. It was impossible to completely Russify the Muslims despite intervention in all spheres of public life. "In the Russian Empire during the period under review, there were no concepts of confessional religious education." [44]

I.K. Zagidullin claims that the influence of the settled Muslim Tatars on the Kazakhs greatly exceeded the government's policy of acculturation. In the first case, it was about a large-scale socio-cultural influence of the Tatars on the Kazakh community: in everyday communication, through Tatar mullahs, shakirds and Kazakhs who graduated from Tatar Madrasah colleges, books (since the beginning of the 19th century), newspapers and magazines (from 1905), and the education of Kazakh boys in confessional and secular national schools. This interaction in the frontier zones was bilateral. However, in terms of spreading Islam, literacy and Jadidism, the Tatar influence dominated [21].

The analysis of archives and document collections emphasizes the complexity of state-confessional relations and the contradictions between the goals of cultural assimilation of the Russian Empire and the aspirations of the Muslim population.

5. Conclusions

The study emphasizes the correspondence of regional administrative institutions to the policy of the Russian Empire, covering such areas as military service, personnel policy and relations with the local population. Social changes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to the development of education and enlightenment throughout the Russian Empire, even in remote regions inhabited by different peoples.

For the purpose of Christianization and Russification, state-confessional relations were established, and public education and social movements served as channels for their implementation. Administrative unity and cultural-linguistic politics were used to suppress opposing cultural influences. Muslim schools were under formal control in the following decades.

Thus, the policy of Christianization and Russification realized by the Russian Empire, especially in the context of education and state-confessional relations, faced serious problems among the Muslim population. The forced implementation of an alien culture caused a response from the Muslim peoples, for whom the preservation of their own nation was associated with their religious identity. The introduction of Russian language classes, the appointment of Russian language teachers, and attempts to reform Muslim educational institutions were met with protests and opposition from Muslims, who perceived these measures as a threat to their religious rights and cultural autonomy.

The study limitations are primarily related to the research of the specific region of Kazakhstan, which might hinder the ability to generalize the results for other Muslim peoples in different regions and time periods.

Further research should focus on the events and consequences of educational policy and the formation of identity after the Russian Empire.

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant No. AP19676432 ‘Religious traditions and charity in Kazakh society (XIX-early XX century)’).

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