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# ELEMENTS OF UTOPIANISM IN THE VIEWS OF ASAN QAIGY, CONFUCIUS, PLATO AND AL-FARABI COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

The article presents a comparative analysis of the correlation between realistic and utopian aspects in the teachings of Asan Qaigy, Confucius, Plato and Al-Farabi. Asan Qaigy was a respected bey, an advisor to a few khans, a famous zhyrau (poet-improviser), a wise man and a creator of a social utopia. After the collapse of the Golden Horde and the White Horde, when different clans and tribes started isolating themselves, he fought for the unification of all Kazakh clans and tribes into a single state and later. When it was established, he supported it in many ways by his actions and songs. Seeing the poor living conditions of his people, in his imagination, he created an ideal place without conflicts and wars, where all people would be happy. He called this land 'Zher uyuq', which means 'Promised Land'. Not only did he poetize this land, but was going to find it being sure that it existed somewhere in his time. As for other thinkers, they built ideal states in their imagination on the basis of their ideals and did not intend to look for them in real life. For example, Confucius thought that an ideal state existed in China in the distant past, while Plato and Al-Farabi projected their theoretical models of an ideal state onto potential future. Thus, Asan Qaigy was the only philosopher who believed that it existed in his day.

*Keywords:* realism, person, government, virtuous, city

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## 1. Introduction

Research into the views of Asan Qaigy, a great wise man of the Kazakh Steppe, in comparison with the views of other outstanding thinkers is oriented at finding out something that cannot always be found if they are studied without reference to other doctrines. Both realistic and utopian ideas are easily identified in the views of Asan Qaigy. The same combination can be found in the works of such famous thinkers as Confucius, Plato and Al-Farabi. Therefore, a theoretical

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task of conducting a comparative analysis of utopian ideas expressed by Asan Qaigy and the above-mentioned thinkers comes up.

## **2. Methods**

The main method used in this research was the comparative method. It made it possible to establish differences and similarities in the utopias created by the four thinkers. The textological method was employed to reproduce the ideas of the analysed thinkers in an authentic way. Apart from that, the culture-historical approach was used. Instead of abstract studies of the views expressed by a certain thinker, it suggests their exploration in the context of the cultural and historical environment that conditioned their development.

## **3. The life and main ideas of Asan Qaigy**

The real name of Asan Qaigy was Hasan Sabituly; ‘Qaigy’ was his nickname. In Kazakh, ‘qaigy’ means ‘sadness’. He is often called ‘the Sad’, but ‘sad’ (an adjective) is ‘qaigyly’ in Kazakh. Thus, the noun ‘qaigy’ can be translated as ‘a sad man’. This is how this word was translated by M.O. Auezov. He wrote, “People called his Qaigy, which means ‘a sad man’” [1, p. 322]. He was given this nickname because he often used to reflect on the unfavourable conditions of life at that period.

He was born in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Volga region and died in the 1460s in the territory of the modern Ulytau district of the Karaganda region in Kazakhstan. The first Asan lived in Sarai and then moved to Kazan. When he reached an elderly age, he returned to Eastern Desht-i Qipchaq. Asan was one of the influential beys during the reign of several khans. Bey is a title and a rank. The word ‘bey’ was added to names of Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Kara-Kalpaks, Altaians and Nogais. The title ‘bey’ was awarded only to judges who were known for their great fairness and relied only on the provisions of the codified steppe law ‘Zhety Zhargy’ (‘Seven Provisions’). A bey possesses knowledge about the history of his people, their everyday life, customs and traditions; he was wise and eloquent.

C.C. Valikhanov wrote, “Among the Kirghizs (the Kazakhs) - the authors’ note - awarding the title of bey did not require any formal choice of the people or approval of the authorities ruling the people. Only deep knowledge of the judicial practice combined with outstanding public speaking skills gave a Kirghiz an opportunity to receive this honorary title. In order to acquire the title of bey, a Kirghiz had to show his judicial knowledge and rhetorical abilities to the people a number of times. The word about such people spread fast throughout the Steppe; as a result, everyone knew their name. Thus, the title of bey was a sort of patent for judicial and legal practice. As a rule, if children of beys had extensive legal experience, they inherited the knowledge and titles belonging to their fathers.” [2, p. 326]

Apart from that, Asan Qaigy was a zhyrau. The word 'zhyrau' is derived from the Kazakh word 'zhyr' which means 'song', 'poem'. "Unlike a zhyrshy, a zhyrau was not only a singer but also an author of songs." [Zhyrau, *Wikipedia*, <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%96%D1%8B%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%83>]

The time in which Asan Qaigy lived and worked, was quite difficult. It was the time of the collapse of the Golden Horde and the White Horde, which gathered momentum in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was accompanied by civil strife of different kinds and other internal conflicts. During this period, related tribal and ethnic communities started to aim for political independence and establishment of their own state formations. These processes triggered mass decampment of Kazakh clans and tribes from Eastern Desht-i Qipchaq (also called the Polovtsy Steppe) to Western Semirechye. A.N. Taukelev writes, "A part of lineage groups that had been related from olden times isolated themselves in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries under new names - the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Nogais, etc. The Kazakh ethnicity developed from old lineage groups - Zhalair, Naiman, Alchin, Qipchaq and others." [3, p. 41] The decampment to Western Semirechye was led by Zhanibek, the son of the last khan of the White Horde and the Golden Horde Barak. So he became one of the founders of the Kazakh Khanate and its ruler. Asan Qaigy became his advisor. He was a strong supporter of unification of all Kazakh clans and tribes into a single state, worried about consolidation of the Kazakh Khanate, and aspired to create a united state out of related tribes. He believed that "first it is necessary to augment the power of the khan and to strengthen the people's defence". He reproached Zhanibek Khan, "Without thinking about the future of the Kazakh people, you celebrate temporary success" [A. Kaygy, *Wikipedia*, [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%90%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD\\_%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B3%D1%8B](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%90%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD_%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B3%D1%8B)].

The realism of Asan Qaigy's works consists in the fact that in his zhyrau based on real situations he gave advice to rulers how to govern their people and also instructed people how to behave in certain situations. "There was an ethics of intrageneric communication, kinship, which was connected with the living conditions and human life of the person in the traditional society. The Kazakh always stayed in the circle of kindred family relations, and it was the basis, regulating the behaviour in everyday life, in the routine life practice. Presentation of the world outlook through the kindred relations is still typical for the Kazakh. The individuum is being dissolved in the traditional worldview; he is minimally independent and is subject to common norms and values. Collective views and ideas dominate over the separate, individual worldview. The world was assimilated as something integral; believes, customs, principles and religious faiths, that made the life sense bearing, were formed. They were the principles of virtuous thought, virtuous wise word, and virtuous deed. It is the worship of the fire, the sky, the water, the earth, the faith into the aruakhs - the spirits of ancestors. The person should be sincere and honest, should be afraid of bad word, deceit, as the evil is connected with them." [4, p. 218] This is why Asan tried to explain the meaning of changes taking place in society and in nature. This way he exerted a great influence on the development of thinking

and worldviews held by the Kazakh people. As O.A. Segizbaev points out, “The topic of Earth and human life in interaction with it was central ... in Asan Qaigy’s works” [5].

Asan Qaigy taught his fellow tribesman to distinguish good from bad and vice versa. In general, he supported Zhanibek Khan’s policies. Nevertheless, he treated the khan not with blind deference, but from the perspective of interested objectivity.

Being a real historical figure, Asan Qaigy also became a character of folk tales and legends. It is connected with the fact that in his imagination he created a kind of Promised Land and believed in its existence. M.O. Auezov writes, “Sometimes he calls this promised land ‘Zher uyuq’, at other times - ‘Zhideli Baysyn’” [1, p. 322]. Asan Qaigy did not confine himself to reflections about this happy land; in fact, “he decided to find another world, a promised land, where days are void of sadness, where the lands are fertile, where there is no hostility and where larks peacefully weave nests on a sheep’s back. On his fast she-camel Zhelmaya he traveled all Kazakh steppes, mountains and valleys. Up until now people living on the banks of each river, inhabitants of mountain ridges and areas pass on to each other the appraisal of their territory given by Asan Qaigy is his short verses.” [6, p. 100-101]

What he was looking for was first and foremost a land of plenty for a nomadic lifestyle (for the ideal life he could imagine was if not fully nomadic, then at least semi-nomadic). Therefore, people and cattle should have enough food, the climate should be mild and life should be entirely peaceful, without wars or strife, so that there is only love and friendship between people. Legend has it that Asan visited Russia, Bukhara, China, Iran and Afghanistan but, in fact, he traveled only throughout the territory of Kazakhstan of that time.

Wherever Asan came, he spoke about this place and the degree to which it matched the ideal of the Promised Land. Once, Asan visited Zhideli Baysyn. When he came back, he told his clansmen, “I have found a camping ground where one can ride a horse without and clashes or fights, where our cattle will not be stolen by robbers or killed by wolves, where we will not remain without shelter. Let us set off for this land. To get there, for three years do not let a ram approach a ewe, a he-camel - to a she-camel and a bull - to a cow. It is warm in that land. We will live there without allotments (without becoming estranged)” (as cited in [7, p. 24]). According to one of the versions, it was the result of the search conducted by Asan Qaigy. According to another version, “he did not find the promised land and died without achieving his dream” [8, p. 370]. There is also a third version suggested by M.O. Auezov and L.S. Sobolev. They write, “Not having found the desired land anywhere, he announced to the people that he would lead them to an unknown land, but his death prevented him from keeping his promise and he died, taking with him his sadness and the unfulfilled dream about the welfare of his long-suffering people” [6, p. 100-101].

#### **4. The realistic and utopian aspects of the views expressed by Confucius, Plato and Al-Farabi**

Confucius, Plato and Al-Farabi differ not only from Asan Qaigy but also from each other. They all lived in different epochs and cultures and represented different worldviews. What they have in common is the presence of not only realistic but also utopian aspects in their views and teachings.

Confucius (Kǒng Fūzǐ) was the founder of one of the two main philosophical schools - zhu jia. As a realist, Confucius criticizes the contemporary state of the society for turning away from the Dao way. He says, "There has been no way in the Heavenly Empire for a long time..." [9, p. 68]. Besides, people's behaviour is a long way off from human nature. According to Confucius, human nature represents a system of constituent elements. The core of this system is Wūcháng, or 'five constants'. Confucius believed that the most important virtue out of these five was Ren, or humaneness. Confucius said that humaneness was a way of life implying that "what you don't want yourself, don't do to others..." [9, p. 113]. This formula is repeated several times in 'Lun Yu'. What is important, according to Confucius, humaneness does not depend on wealth: both a rich man and a poor one can possess this virtue.

Confucius identifies two ideal types (in M. Weber's understanding), or two models of people, determined by the ethical criterion. They are junzi (a gentleman) and xiaoren (a small or petty person). They are direct opposites and relate to each other within the value framework, similarly to the relationship between Heaven and Earth. Junzi is in the superior position, while xiaoren - in the inferior one. Junzi is endowed only with positive socioethical characteristics and represents the five constants. Xiaoren, on the contrary, is endowed only with negative features.

A gentleman is different from, or rather, opposed to a small person not only in terms of their socioethical characteristics. The former is opposed to the latter on the ontological level, i.e., in the first place, in terms of their attitude to the Dao and Heaven. For example, a gentleman always remains humane, values fairness, etc., but also always tries to find the right way. A gentleman is always connected with Heaven and tries to find out its will.

It should be noted that in Confucius' conversations along with junzi and xiaoren an expression 'junren' is also used (literally it means 'a medium man'). For instance, "With the one who rises above the medium man you can speak about the supreme matters; but with the one who is inferior to him you cannot speak about those" [9, p. 82]. The term 'junren' does not denote a third ideal type of person. Identification of junren along with junzi and xiaoren by Confucius suggests that the ideal types - junzi and xiaoren - are not real people living at the time of Confucius, but characters of his social utopia.

The Confucius' ideal of social and governmental structure existed in the distant past, when China was ruled by the legendary emperors Yao, Shun and Yu. Confucius says the following about himself, "I do not create - I continue; I believe in antiquity and love it with all my heart" [9, p. 84]. Therefore, the

Confucian utopia is a retroutopia. Only when the times of Yao, Shun and Yu are back, junzi and xiaoren will emerge in their pure form and the Dao will return to the Heavenly Empire.

So, while Asan Qaigy is looking for Zher uyuq at the current time, Confucius 'has found' the ideal social structure in the distant and, perhaps, mythical, past.

Plato lived in a totally different type of culture. Based on this typology of state structures, Plato developed his utopian vision of the ideal state. He creates a model of an ideal state as isomorphic to the best soul, namely a virtuous one. Therefore, a state should be virtuous, i.e. just. According to Plato, "the state and the soul of an individual contain the same components, and their number is equal" [10, p. 236]. He argues that the soul consists of three hierarchically related parts: logical, spirited and appetitive. In an ideal state, these parts correspond with three social classes: rulers, soldier and producers, according to the prevailing aspect in their souls. One can draw a parallel with the Vedic Varna system, which divides the society into four varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras). Rulers should be chosen from people governed by the logic; these are philosophers.

While the Confucian utopia is a retroutopia, the one developed by Plato can be called a proutopia (derived from the Latin pro - 'forward'). Plato understood that in empirical reality the state he depicted as ideal existed neither in his day nor in the past. From the perspective of values, an ideal state that corresponds with Plato's vision of an ideal state is the opposite of existing states and all their perverted forms. According to Plato, an aristocratic form of government matches this ideal to the greatest degree, but still does not fully coincide with it. At the same time, he insists that an ideal state must exist in real life since it corresponds with the structure of a human soul and it is above the body. Therefore, it should be established and the faster the better. This is what differentiates a utopia from a myth: a myth is focused on the preservation of the status quo, while a utopia - on its transformation. Thereby Plato makes the transition from myth to logos in terms of the views on the sociocultural reality. The same applies to Confucius. It is important that both philosophers substantiated their utopias not only anthropologically, but also ontologically. Plato created, so to speak, full ontology. It seems fair to say that he developed two ontologies. According to the first one, the world consists of two dimensions, or levels, - "the sensible world and the intelligible world" [10, p. 317]. In a person, these two parameters correspond with the body and soul. According to the second ontology, the world comprises three levels - the world of ideas, the world soul, or the soul of the world, and the material world. Accordingly, the soul also consists of three levels. Thus, similarly to Confucius, who substantiated his utopian model by referring not only to junzi, but also to Heaven (ideal state structure is pleasing to Heaven), Plato substantiated his utopian model by its correspondence not only with the structure of the soul, but also with the structure of the world, or Universe.

The outstanding Arab philosopher of Turkic descent Abu Nasr al-Farabi was born between 870 and 872 in Farab (the territory of modern Kazakhstan) and died between 950 and 951 in Damascus (modern Syria). He is an author of numerous works in diverse subject areas, including sociopolitical writings created from the perspective of a clear realism, such as 'Civil Politics' and 'Aphorisms of the Statesman'. Apart from that, he wrote a work containing social utopia. It is called 'Principles of the Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City'. This treatise is not fully devoted to the description of the utopia. In the same way as 'The Republic' by Plato contains all fundamental principles of his philosophy in an explicit form, this treatise features the key points of Al-Farabi's doctrine. The treatise contains 37 chapters and only the last 12 of them are devoted to the utopia. Al-Farabi writes that by their nature a person is meant to achieve perfection, which is possible only in the course of joint activities carried out by a number of people. This is why people formed communities, "some of which represent complete societies, and others - incomplete. Complete communities", writes Al-Farabi, "are of three types: large, medium and small" [11, p. 303-304]. Complete communities are perfect communities, while incomplete are imperfect. According to Al-Farabi, a large community embraces all people that inhabit Earth; a medium one consists of people living in a part of Earth, while a small community is represented by the population of a city within this part. As for people living in a settlement, a quarter, a street or, finally, in one house, Al-Farabi calls them an incomplete society. "Members of the last group comprise the society of the lowest level." [11, p. 304]

Al-Farabi believes that the most perfect form of society is a city. It should be noted that Al-Farabi understands a city not just as a unit of administrative-territorial division, but as a city-state similar to a Greek polis. He writes, "The highest perfection can be achieved primarily by a city, but by no means by a society standing on the lower level of perfection" [11, p. 304]. At the same time, cities can be different, depending on the people inhabiting it, since they unite of their own volition. Consequently, they may unite for doing evil things. The most perfect city is a virtuous city where people unite for mutual help and achievement of common happiness. If a virtuous city expands its borders consistently, sooner or later "the whole Earth will become virtuous" [11, p. 305]. Al-Farabi says that a healthy city is similar to a healthy body, in which all parts function in a coordinated and harmonious manner [12].

According to Al-Farabi, the organization of a city is the following. "In the city there is a certain person - its head and other people approaching this head in terms of their virtues, each of whom, according to their position and abilities, carries out the actions prescribed by the goal pursued by the head. They are on the first level. On a lower level are the people acting in accordance with the goals set by the first group - they occupy the second level. In a similar way, they are followed by people acting in accordance with the goals set by the previous group. In this manner various members of the city association are arranged up to those who act in accordance with the goals of the last group and the ones who serve, but are not served. They occupy the lowest level and are the people of the

lowest status.” [11, p. 306-307] The ruler of a virtuous city is “a wise man, a philosopher possessing a perfect mind ... the highest degree of human perfection and is as happy as a man can be” [11, p. 316]. Here we can see the resemblance with Plato’s ideal state. In this connection, “the ruler is a person beyond the control of any other people. He is the Imam; he is the first sovereign of the virtuous city, he is the sovereign of the virtuous people and the sovereign of the whole inhabited land.” [11, p. 317]

This is what the utopian virtuous city created in Al-Farabi’s productive imagination is like. He writes, “A virtuous city is the opposite of an ignorant city, an immoral city, a city of exchange, a city that has lost its way. Equally, it is the opposite of individuals representing such cities.” [11, p. 322] Al-Farabi goes on to characterize cities that are antipodes of the virtuous city. Here we will only cite the characteristics of a city of exchange. Al-Farabi writes, “A city of exchange is that the inhabitants of which help each other to achieve prosperity and wealth, but not as a means of achieving something else, but as a purpose of their whole life” [11, p. 323]. These are the basic features of the utopia developed by Al-Farabi. Just like Plato’s utopia, it is a proutopia.

## 5. Conclusions

Historically, the phenomenon of utopia arises in antiquity. It is the product of the work of consciousness. Utopia emerges as a result of a person’s aspiration to change the present reality. This ideal becomes the regulatory idea of the spiritual life of the individual. The article analyses four teachings of thinkers who lived and worked in different eras and regions, which could not but affect their ideas. Teachings of some (Plato and Al-Farabi) are comprehensively studied while teachings of others (Confucius and Asan Qaigy) are less developed. However, all of them are united by dissatisfaction with the present reality for various reasons. Each of them contrasted this reality with a concept that contained a share of utopianism. Consequently, their teachings cannot be wholly reduced to utopianism. Some thinkers, like Confucius, did not specifically develop utopias; they simply believed that the ideal social structure existed in the distant past. Others, like Plato and al-Farabi, designed such a structure. Asan Qaigy’s utopia is a dream built in his imagination. While the rest of the considered thinkers understood that in the reality, the utopias they built were not possible, Asan Qaigy believed that the utopia he created in his imagination - ‘Promised Land’ (‘Zher uyuq’) - really existed somewhere and was consciously looking for it. On his part, this was a manifestation of naivety, since in the real - no matter how vast - geographical territory of his time, no ‘Promised Land’ existed. Since the teachings of the thinkers analyzed in the article are not limited to utopias, they can be considered incomplete utopias, or ‘pseudo-utopias’. An ideological construction, such as T. More’s ‘Utopia’, can be considered a real utopia.

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