
**THE IMPACT OF RELIGION AND TRADITIONS
WIDESPREAD AMONG THE POPULATION OF
KAZAKHSTAN ON THE CHANGES THAT TOOK
PLACE IN SOCIETY IN THE 18th-19th CENTURIES
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF
RUSSIA**

**Gulfairus K. Zhapekova^{1*}, Maxot S. Janguzhiyev¹,
Zhanar K. Mukhangaliyeva², Zhanna K. Tastayeva² and
Kulyash V. Dshumagaliyeva³**

¹*L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, str. Satpayev 2, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan*

²*Makhambet Utemissov West Kazakhstan State University, N. Nazarbayev Ave 162, Uralsk, Kazakhstan*

³*Saken Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical University, Zhenis Ave 62, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan*

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Abstract

Interaction between countries, the necessity of strengthening intercultural ties and overcoming stereotypes and prejudices are among the key focus areas studied by researchers. The most interesting periods are those connected with civilizational fractures, when the influence of dominant cultures, colonial expansions in particular, had both positive and destructive impact on local traditions and customs. This article looks at the historical experience of interactions between traditional Kazakh society and neighbouring countries from the 19th to the early 20th century. The authors seek answers to the following questions: what response mechanisms could have been used for adaptation and preservation of unique characteristics of a certain culture? It is necessary to identify the role of religion in the development of religious education since as the Russian Empire expanded its colonies to the East it incorporated territories of countries that had practiced Islam for several centuries? The historical experience of coexistence of different peoples in this region shows that harmonious interaction between Christianity and Islam is possible.

Keywords: traditional, society, mullahs, interconfessional, relations

*E-mail: gulfairus_zhapekova@mail.ru

1. Introduction

The period from the 18th to the 19th century became a crucial point in the history of Kazakhstan as a result of its accession to the Russian Empire. The difficult situation that had arisen both in the internal and external policy of the Kazakh Khanate required the adoption of new parameters of sociocultural activities. Incorporation of Kazakhstan involved the establishment of Russian protectorate over its territory. Russian fortresses, fortified lines and towns were actively constructed along the Russian-Kazakh border during this period.

The policy of Russian autocracy in the sphere of religious education of peoples living in the territory of Kazakhstan was based on the model tested on Tatar population. The imperial government relied on the institution of religion that had been formed earlier in this region and supported Muslims loyal to the Russian rule. This activity was based on the decree of 1786 that authorized building mosques and madrasahs. Moreover, the very fact of using Tatar and Bashkir experience was more reliable for the imperial government, taking into account the historical relationships of these peoples with the Russian Empire [1].

It should be noted that throughout the whole history of the development of Kazakh society religion had its markers of axiological meaning [2]. The religious beliefs of nomads, their essential views on the world and their place in this world were based on syncretic perception of different religious principles. The functioning of the Great Silk Road played an important role in the spread of religious ideas: Buddhism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity were spreading actively along this route. “In the 7th–8th centuries Nestorianism was widely spreading in the towns of South Kazakhstan and Semirechye. There were Christian churches in many towns. At the turn of the 10th century, the Christian Archdiocese of Karluk was formed, Christian churches functioned in Taraz and Merck and Christians lived in the cities of the Syr Darya. William of Rubruck mentioned Christians of the Ili Valley, who had their own church in Kajalyk and their village.” [3]

According to M. Omelicheva, Islamization of Central Asia, which started in the 7th century, involved the sedentary population of the south to a higher degree, while the steppe with nomadic tribes did not become fertile ground for spreading of Islam. Canonical Islam is a religion that requires developed urban infrastructure. Educational centres are very significant in urban environment and during that period, madrasahs served as the main source of religious knowledge [4]. The nomadic culture was resistant to any forms of theocracy or strict practices of canonical Islam. According to Khalid, “In nomadic communities power was based on genealogic traditions and governmental structures of that time drew their authority from adat, folk customs and the institution of elders rather than from the legal traditions of Sharia, as opposed to urban communities, where generations of ulama developed the idea of state power” [5, p. 267]. Thus, having a long history of existence in Kazakhstan, Islam shaped the religious consciousness of steppe inhabitants. This type of religious identity is formed “in the process of comparison with other confessional groups, which creates a certain religious

worldview typical of this community” [6, p. 100]. Such beliefs are oriented towards integration with cultural and religious paradigms and are based on a developed religious tradition.

2. Methods

The diversity of intercultural communications requires a certain type of systematization and, depending on it, selection of basic methodological principles and approaches to the study of the past. The problematic chronological method allowed us to examine the changes in the interaction between culture and religion at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries over time and identify the components of this process. The comparative historical method made it possible to determine common and specific features of cultural processes in the region. Research into history and culture of peoples incorporated into the Russian Empire had an extremely significant influence on Central Asia [7]. Russian/Soviet orientalism had a particularly important impact in Central Asia, where in early Soviet times, new republics, later states, were created, often based on the distorted perceptions of scholars in St. Petersburg and Moscow and often cutting across previously existing political and cultural boundaries [8]. Methodological analysis of the ethno-religious aspect of the education policy implemented by the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century is presented in works by P.K. Dashkovskiy & E.A. Shershneva [9] and G.M. Razdykova [10]. The issues connected with the development of Turkic and Muslim movements at the beginning of the 20th century and evolution of Turkic ideas in Kazakhstan have been examined by S.D. Sarkulova, E.K. Kuldibayev, Z.N. Botbaeva and A.K. Kadirov [11]. The work by G.K. Zhapekova, Z.D. Kabidenova, S. Rysbekova, A. Ramazonova and K. Biyazydykova looks at peculiarities of religious identity formation in traditional Kazakh society, demonstrates the results of interaction between Islam and Christianity in this region and contains conclusions about a harmonious balance between these religious cultures [12]. The work by S. Sabol devoted to specific features of the genesis of national consciousness is also of great interest [13].

An important aspect of the research was the usage of works that examines the colonial period in Kazakhstan. According to S.A. Koroleva, steppe space in the 18th -19th centuries turned out to be organically included in the strategic plans of the Russian state: “The region acted as the sphere of power interests of Russia not because of its administrative and economic situation, which was characteristic of the policies of the largest European colonial powers, but because of the need to establish a clear state border in Central Asia by way of achieving ‘natural borders’, i.e. rivers and mountain ranges. ‘Natural borders’ were a European construct, which the Russian authorities used as a necessary element in the process of understanding the imperial space.” [14]

Mark von Hagen in his work ‘The History of Russia as the History of the Empire: Prospects for a Federalist Approach’ notes that the study of the Russian Empire history was centred around the problems of expansionism in its various

forms - annexation, conquest, exploitation and oppression [15]. Of great importance is the definition of the metropolis by R. Sunee, a professor of the University of Chicago and a specialist in theory of imperial statehood and typology of imperial government. In his opinion, the metropolis is an institution of political domination, and relations between the metropolis and the periphery are characterized as centre-periphery relations, but not according to ethnicity [16]. Matsuzato Kimitaka also believes that the Russian Empire is built on territorial principles, not ethnic ones. Governorate Generals are territorial federalism, not ethnic one [17].

According to Ricard Vulpius, integration policy was a specific feature of Russian imperial construction. Let compare the behaviour of Russia and the nature of Britain expansion. For the Russian imperial elite, a civilizational mission implied settling and conversion to Orthodoxy. It assumed the spread of the Russian language and culture and, as a result, the desire to introduce 'foreigners' to the Russian way of life. This understanding of the civilizational mission was aimed at the full integration of the newly annexed peoples, implying a deliberate dissolution of lands in the body of the empire. In the case of the West, where the imperial idea was based on the ideology of freedom and trade, such a merger was impossible. Part of this logic was the belief that in the distant future, self-government should be transferred into the hands of the local population. The British followed a strategy of segregation and reinforcement of existing differences. An even greater role was played by the fact that, before the start of the Modern Age, the nation-states in the West were more or less consolidated, and this happened before the construction of the empire began. On the contrary, Russian national and imperial construction took place at about the same time [18].

Ideological substantiation of colonialism consisted in the necessity to spread culture and education. The colonial rule established its administrative bodies and imposed its culture, religion, language and customs. The author of the book 'The nomads of Eurasia in the kaleidoscope of centuries and millennia', J.O. Artykbaev, believes that European researchers view nomads of the 18th-19th centuries as inhabitants of the periphery rather than owners of the centre of Eurasia [19]. On the other hand, according to B.B. Imrukhanov's opinion stated in his monograph 'History of Kazakhstan: experience of theoretical and methodological research', the steppe civilization of the 19th century faced the increasing challenge of transition to intensive forms of manufacturing and new types of relations. B.B. Irmukhanov agrees with Arnold Toynbee [20] that in the 19th century and early 20th century the nomadic society had no prospects for further development, so the only way forward was transition to a sedentary lifestyle [21].

Therefore, it is reasonable to examine the main directions of policy regarding the incorporation of Kazakhstan into the Russian Empire using the comparative method, which makes it possible to conduct comparative analysis of colonial and religious policies.

3. Specific features characterizing religion and culture of the population of Kazakhstan

Throughout the whole history of the Kazakh people, this ethnic group was a participant of the system of cultural ties existing between neighbouring countries. The territories of Kazakh settlements encompassed vast steppe areas of Central Asia up to the Altai Mountains. The start of national unification dates back to the 15th century when the Kazakh Khanate was established. “The Russian invasion directed towards the Kazakh steppe began in the 18th century and continued until the beginning of the 19th century when Kazakhstan came under Russian rule.” [22]

In his work ‘From Siberia’, V.V. Radlov, a researcher of Siberia, examined the history and associated manners, customs and mentality of the Kazakh people in detail. His observations concerning ethnic, social and political structures are of interest. Radlov notes, “I have myself lived among Kazakhs for a long time and had a chance to see that it is not anarchy that governs their life, but peculiar cultural relations - different from ours but quite regulated” [23]. The researcher thinks that nomadic life is a totally different stage on the scale of civilization, opposite to the culture of sedentary peoples’ era. Radlov believes that reduction in people’s welfare was one of the results of introduction of the 1822 statute. His attitude to reforms of the 19th century is vividly expressed in the quote, “An order imposed externally and based on idle speculations can only hinder genuine progress” [23].

According to Radlov, Kazakhs had a high level of culture due to adoption of Muslim value orientations, “Kazakhs stand in stark contrast to nomadic Turks of the Altai, they are at a higher level of development in terms of their lifestyle and thinking.” In Radulov’s opinion, this difference could be explained by the fact that Kazakhs had practiced Islam for many centuries. There is no doubt that great order in the matters of clothing and organization of the house, tidiness, well-ordered family relations and more developed ethical principles were due to the influence of the Muslim religion. “A wrong idea is widespread that Kazakhs fully converted into Islam only recently and, moreover, remain nearly pagans up to the present time. Actually, it has been several centuries since Kazakhs adopted Islam and can legitimately be considered faithful, if not fanatical, Muslims, though the Kazakh Islam has surely acquired a peculiar shade due to the specific lifestyle steppe nomads lead.” [23, p. 347]

G. Barlybaeva points out that “adoption of the Muslim culture boosted the development of science and culture in medieval Kazakhstan. On the one hand, having replaced archaic cults, Islam encouraged a rise of morality, intellectual and cultural progress of the Kazakh people. On the other hand, it was Islam that became of the key factors in the preservation of statehood, ethnic and cultural identity.” [24] The process of Islamization had virtually finished by the end of the 19th century, involving the northern regions of Kazakhstan. Mosques and madrasahs had appeared where Islamic norms, injunctions and ethics were taught.

4. Influence of Russian foreign policy on the territory of Kazakhstan

In the second half of the 19th century, the national policy of Russia became a follow-on to the internal tsarist autocracy. A high-ranking military officer, the Governor-General of Western Siberia P.M. Kaptsevich thought that it was reasonable to exercise restraint and be more tolerant to religious customs of Kazakhs. Kaptsevich understood that Kazakhs who inhabited the south-western shore of the Aral Sea were traditionally under the Muslim influence of neighboring Turkic-speaking countries.

Kaptsevich supported the idea of wide engagement of mullahs on the side of the government by peaceful means. The Governor-General of Western Siberia believed that if mullahs were introduced into the new administrative system, it would not only allow them to conduct their religious ceremonies without any limitations but also give the authorities an opportunity to use the real authority of Islamic clergy. According to Kaptsevich, “A mullah is full of zeal and eager to introduce peaceful environment in the steppe through preaching Islam and translating divine prescriptions” [The Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, FA, series 1, case 272 (1st side)]. First and foremost, Kaptsevich saw a political sense in it and strongly suggested providing each mullah with “printed translated copies of the 1822 statute”. The tense socio-political situation in the Middle zhuz after adoption of the 1822 statute that regulated the system of managing the indigenous peoples of Siberia called for a soft policy, in order to calm down “all nobles from khan’s families”, senior sultans, honorary elders, beys and “good Kirghiz people from big to small, as well as aliens living within these territories” [The Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, The CSA of the RK, Fund 4, series 1, case 272, 8].

It is a known fact that Tatars, merchants and clergy, settled in the Kazakh steppe in the period from the 18th to the 20th century. The initial impetus for admission of Tatar mullahs to Kazakhstan was given by the Russian authorities, “Mohammedanism was spread not in the least by fire and sword, but by the power of preaching and persuasion, by spreading the word that Mohammedanism gives people unity and strength, so if the Russian government wants to expand its influence, Tatars should be sent as pioneers” [25]. When the tsarist administration sent Tatar mullahs to Kazakhstan, it provided them with an allowance and allocated funds for building mosques and madrasahs. Moreover, representatives of Muslim clergy from Kazakhs also received support since the authorities counted on their loyal attitude to colonial policy. At the same time, the government took active measures to promote Christian missionary work and ‘Russification of aliens’. The reform of 1861 played an important role in the sphere of education. So-called zemstvo schools appeared in the Russian Empire and became the main type of schools. However, they were not introduced in borderlands or the Kazakh steppe. Unlike zemstvo schools, parochial schools became very widespread at the beginning of the 1880s and the government allocated significant funds for their development. ‘Rules of parochial schools’ were adopted on June 13, 1884, which encouraged establishment of many schools

in Russian borderlands [26]. Over a million of children began to study in rural areas; textbooks and monthly journals started to be published (for example, S.I. Altynsarin wrote two textbooks for students of Russian-Kazakh schools: 'Kyrgyz Textbook' and 'An Initial Guide to Teaching Kyrgyz to the Russian Language') [27].

5. Migration processes in Kazakhstan and their impact on modernization of society

The impact of Tatar settlers on Kazakhs was controversial. Consequently, there were different appraisals of the role of Tatars in the development of civic and religious education, both negative and positive. Absattar-haji Derbisali writes about the role of Tatar clergy, "Tatar and Bashkir mullahs continued helping Kazakhs to build mosques and madrasahs, preaching Islamic ideas in the steppe, publishing religious literature in Kazan and Orenburg" [28]. This influence found its way through Tatar mullahs and merchants who came to Kazakhstan. The Kazakh-Tatar relations are long-standing and strong since the Tatar ethnicity is one of the most numerous in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh and Tatar peoples are close due to their common origin. Among other things, their languages are cognate since they belong to the Kipchak group of Turkic languages. Moreover, they are united by religion - the Sunni tradition of Islam.

Researchers date mass migration of Tatars to Kazakh steppes to the 18th century. Neighbouring Muslim countries exercised great influence on Kazakhs, especially in the last decades of the 19th century. Well-off Kazakhs hired Tatars as tutors to teach their children. Those were mainly Kazan and Tobol Tatars, "hundreds of whom yearly move to Kirghiz steppes" [23, p. 348]. Moreover, rich Kazakhs opened free schools for children from nearby auls. Radlov said that he had seen such schools many times. Teachers were usually hired for two or three years and in most cases, they were able to teach 30-50 children reading, writing and fundamentals of Islam and turn them into true Muslims [23].

The social struggle between different segments of population and development of the national liberation movement encouraged growth of the social movement in Tatarstan and Kazakhstan. The modernist movements in the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim countries seeking to modernize traditional Islamic societies were also of great importance. "The Great Reform era Russia, as well as the modernist movements in the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim lands, represent the background, against which the Muslims of the Russian Empire engaged in the scrutiny of the reasons behind the backwardness of their societies and began advocating the compatibility of Islam with modernity." [29]

As towns and transit trade with Central Asian khanates and China developed, the number of Tatar merchants increased significantly in the steppe. Development of market relations encouraged activities conducted by Tatar entrepreneurs, who were trying to reach out to target markets beyond the Volga and Urals regions. The primary focus area of Tatar entrepreneurs was Central Asia. At the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, educational institutions

based on new teaching methods were spreading widely in Russia. These developments were largely connected with the name of a famous educator Ismail Gasprinskiy. Many Tatar entrepreneurs, such as the Akchurins, Khusainovs, Ramievs and others, actively supported establishment of these institutions. They contributed to establishment of schools, provided financing, etc. [30]. In madrasahs and maktabas, they found gifted students that showed inclinations and talents for pedagogical work and sent them to pedagogical educational institutions in Kazan, Orenburg and Ufa. Apart from mullahs, merchants from Kazan who traveled around the steppe and took on the role of missionaries also had a big impact on society. Having received primary education at home, Kazakh youths went to Tatar madrasahs to study Islam more deeply. The influence became even more effective when Kazakh students started studying in Tatar madrasahs in the Volga-Ural region. Schools based on new teaching methods also played an important role because they introduced elements of civic education [31].

In 1858, a teacher of the Kazan Theological Academy, N.I. Ilminskiy, moved to Orenburg and found a job of a junior translator in Orenburg boundary commission. Ilminskiy became fluent in the Kazakh language due to being tutored by young Kazakhs who finished the Boundary commission school for Kazakh children. Together with them Ilminskiy translated business correspondence into the Kazakh language. Before that, it had been conducted only in the Tatar language [32]. Ilminskiy created a system of Orthodox religious education for people of the Volga region, Central Asia and Siberia. According to D.K. Zelenin, Ilminskiy developed a belief that “the best way to fight propaganda of other religions is school education of aliens” “that would stimulate them for independent unprejudiced thinking, enrich them with sensible understanding of nature and history and instill respect for reliable evidence into them” [33]. Parochial schools became an important part of the public education system. Up until the 1870s, the only languages of education were Russian and Church Slavonic. Intensive engagement of the clergy to school activities, which was a result of establishment of parochial schools, led to organization and development of other educational institutions: literacy schools and church pedagogical schools. Ilminskiy suggested teaching Christian subjects in the native languages of eastern peoples, creating bilingual schools for aliens (with education in the national and Russian languages), switching written language into the Cyrillic alphabet, publishing educational, religious and other literature in native languages and training teachers among representatives of non-Russian peoples [34]. Schools that used the system developed by Ilminskiy looked more advanced and approached zemstvo schools. This seems even more important if we take into account the fact that there were no zemstvos or zemstvo schools in Kazakhstan. Parochial schools became the dominant type of schools. Russian-Kazakh schools working within the Ilminskiy system led to certain shifts in the aspirations and views shared by intelligentsia of the Turkic peoples, including the clergy [35].

On the whole, aspirations of the Kazakh people for education are a part of heritage still relevant now [36]. People have come to realize that with the help of new knowledge society can develop successfully and reinforce its cultural

identity. “The goal of the concept of higher pedagogical education of the Republic of Kazakhstan is to develop a system for training a new formation pedagogue in the conditions of modernization of higher pedagogical education.” [37] For instance, when modern researchers conduct analysis of the current state of education, they place emphasis on increasing general cultural competency. “General cultural competency is understood as a level of education sufficient for self-learning and self-management of arising cognitive problems and for determining a person’s own position.” [38]

6. Conclusions

To sum up, Russia has had a significant impact on the development of the culture of colonial borderlands. At the end of the 19th century, modernization speeded up rapidly, which entailed changes in all spheres of life. Autocracy actively used the opportunity to employ the power of local traditions and customs to strengthen its rule. State authorities supervised education provided to local people. However, in the course of determining the areas for development of education, they had to take into consideration the changed circumstances and the public opinion and rely on those people whose views were acceptable for the government to a greater degree.

The Eastern policy of Russia was based on the institution of Islam that had a strong foundation. Later this approach allowed the Russian government to use the real influence of the Tatar Muslim clergy. An important component of the education system was the activity of Christian parochial schools closely connected with a number of realia significant for that period.

Territories of countries that practice Islam and Christianity have the potential for unification and integration. Religious education played a special role in preservation of identity of local peoples.

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