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Application of Regional Approach to Studies of Kazakh History of the Imperial Period

In the macrosystem of the continental Russian empire, Kazakhstan occupies a special place. It corresponds with the requirements to consider chronological and geographic factors. Now some historians put forward a concept that there was no common policy of the Russian imperial governance. Therefore, vision of the Russian imperial politics in Kazakhstan must be reevaluated from the viewpoint of institutional, administrative and public context. Which methodological approach can provide a concrete-historical analysis of the above-mentioned concepts? A. Kappeller critically comprehends on that problem taking into account the opinions of historians from different countries. He suggested employing a regional approach:

In future, as it seems to me, a regional approach in history would be innovative. Through overcoming ethnocentrism of national-state traditions, it allows to study the character of polyethnic empires at different special levels. Unlike national history, ethnic and national factors are not absolutized, and along with ethnic conflicts are considered more or less peaceful co-existence of various religious and ethnic groups. The change of perspective, brakes, first of all, outdated and centuries long tradition of centralist approach to history of Russia.[1]

One of the active proponents of the regional approach to understand an imperial history is Russian historian A.V. Remnev.[2] He states that the history of regions must not be replaced by history peoples living there; and the region can be viewed as a common socio-cultural, economic and political administrative system. In one of his publications he writes:

Empire embracing some region in the East, began from its governance development, integration into the imperial political-administrative space,

subsequently using the borderlands as military-economic bridgehead for further imperial enlargement.[3]

It should be noted that the professional historians express certain doubts on the regional approach as a new dimension of the contemporary historiography, first of all, because of the uncertainty of its basic foundations. The definition “region” itself is uncertain, as can be applied to different by size territories. These regions can relate to one state, but also cover several of them, and be divided by a state boundary. The principles of differentiating of regions are not universal too.[4]

In western historiography, in particular in works of A.I. Miller, T. Wilks and R. Geracy on Russian empire are distinguished some sources that to some extent can be viewed as a version of regional approach, as they segregate a certain area in the state, using the borders of modern day states.[5]

National historical written sources combine territorial and ethnic approaches in some way, therefore, historical narrations on the nation is accompanied by an explanation why this or that territory they live on belongs to them “by right”. As is its pointed by historian Z. Kundakbayeva,

[...] in the process of elaborating curricula on history of Russia and Kazakhstan, the chapter on the Russian imperial policy to national borderlands peoples, can influence the stereotypes and model of complex aspects of the past perception. The creation of the image of another state to great extent depends on that-not an image of an alien land, not the piece of Russian empire, but a neighbor, with whom you accumulated a rich experience on co-existence within the framework of one state, and currently have a common border as a natural-geographical zone of direct contacts.[6]

Modern debates on the regional context of imperial history and difficulties the new approach proponents in historiography have to face, undoubtedly, are of important to understand history of Kazakhstan in the period of being part of the imperial space, to establish external (state) and internal borders of the region and its surrounding area.

The historian are of the same opinion that the advance of Russia to the traditional pasturelands of Kazakhs began simultaneously from South Siberia and South Urals, and was backed by erecting fortresses—Omsk (1716) and Semipalatinsk (1718) on the Irtysh River. Along with that were facilitated trade contacts with Kazakhs. Requests on the aid from khans gave Russian an opportunity to strengthen its political influence by military ways. Between 1731 and 1742 khans of the Minor and Middle Hordes, as well as some sultans of Big Horde swore an oath of loyalty to the Russian tsar. Those oaths were interpreted by the Russian side as legal acts to justify its claims on dominance over them and became a starting point to introduce

their peoples into the Russian empire. Z.B. Kundakbayeva meticulously researched in her monograph the texts of the oath of loyalty and came to conclusion that the level of contemporary historical science, overcoming of ideological stereotypes gives a chance to have a fresh look at that problem. The process was very complex and long, filled not only with diplomatic and military activities, but interplay of humans lives and fates, various revelations of deep transformation of the political structure of traditional sociums, and the way of life and thinking modes of the population of the empire.[7]

In the opinion of researchers, after those events, the Russian empire, like Byzantine once, concentrated its attention at the establishing control over the peoples and tribes living along its borders, even they posed no threat to the empire. Further on Kazakh tribes were to become an inalienable part of the empire and lose the remains of their tribal self-governance. The Russian empire borrowed from the Byzantine (and through it—from the Rome) the universalism –isolationism principle. After fall of Constantinople in 1453, Muscovy Rus turned to be the only Orthodox state in the world, but by definition—the best one and worthy, needless of any comparisons with other states or civilizations.

But Mongol khanates, and first of the state of Oirats, city-states of Eastern Turkestan, Kazakh khanates, Kyrgyz and Altay tribal formations, Kokand khanate and others, in different times demonstrated active political power, had their own policies, employed their own principles, norms and forms of external connections. The leaders of those states and people often conflicted with each other and settled them only in military ways. There often frequent cases when such rulers in the power struggle and for their interests' sake, betrayed their peoples, and bargained with foreigners. That made easier for the Qing Chinese rulers to annihilate the Jungar khanate in 1755–1758.

In different times was raised an issue of alternative option for Kazakh leaders in choice of political ally.[8] The choice in favor of Russian is evaluated from the subsequent events view point, of what the Kazakh rulers could not be aware, when they pledged on Russian vassalage. Abulkhair khan and his successors seemed to think only of vassalage under the Russian empire that would not destroy the inner life Kazakh community. A theoretical alternative of Kazakhs entry as well as other peoples of Central Asia into the Russian empire could be the unification of Kazakhs and other Turkic peoples in a new Turkic kaganate, to withstand Jungar and Chinese, and later one, Russian expansions. Moreover, Kazakhs got no real aid from Russia against Jungars.

In opinion of Russian historian V.V. Stolnikov, embracing the territory of Kazakhstan into the Russian empire, had no considerable strategic of

economic significance. He writes “among the causes of the Russian active development of borderlands, priority was given to geopolitical and military-strategic interests posed by that time, not economic considerations”. [9] That conclusion should be absolutized. Russian empire’s westward expansion that led to conquest of the Baltic provinces of Sweden and division of the Polish kingdom, as well as wars with Turkey, from the very start had a powerful economic component—to get access to the seas and seizure of new lands for distribution to the nobility, and acquisition of new trade-industrial centers. As for the eastern borderlands of the empire, mostly geopolitical considerations prevailed. The tsarist government aimed to prevent establishment on its borders of any military-political formations that could make incursions on the imperial territory, and further on could become an ally of China, Persia or Turkey. Further on, new acquired territories turned into the Russian transit trade routes to Central Asia. And later on, after peasant reform of 1861, industrial development and acute land problems in Central Russia, the possessions in the East became an important safety-valve for the Russian economy.

Entry of Kazakhstan into the Russian empire that began from turning Kazakh khans into Russian satellites corresponds the general mechanism of the Russian empire territorial expansion. It was to enlarge all the time; otherwise absence of new buffer territories would pose a threat of the earlier acquired lands defection by being conquered by other states/empires, out becoming independent formations. Such a mechanism makes an empire fragile. They are doomed to eventual death at the moment when stop being strong for new expansion. To get to the “last sea,” conquer all inhabited, or at least, any empire did, not attain civilized space on the Earth. For the Russian such a “return moment” of the intensive external expansion came after failure in the Crimean war, although the eventual collapse of the Russian empire per se occurred in 1917.

Another external policy aspect should be emphasized—expansion to the territory of Kazakhstan. Active enlargement started mainly from the mid XIX century, when the expansion of the Russian empire shifted to the lands with no clear contenders. The Chinese rulers at that time turned into an object of British and French expansion, and the USA later on joined them. For the British Empire, Central Asia was located at the periphery of India, and it could not allocated sufficient resources for military advance into the region. At that time the British were defeated in Afghanistan. The researchers consider, that for Britain control over Afghanistan, moreover over Central Asia, was not essential for the preservation of the empire. In case of Russian control establishment not only over the Central Asia, but Afghanistan too, all the natural barriers and difficulties to connect the central

Asian borderlands with the Russian center, would have made impossible the Russian military campaign to India. England did not make any efforts to launch a military campaign to Central Asia keeping Afghanistan as a buffer between India and the Russian empire. It should be noted, that the soviet historiography underlined that British activities in Central Asia played big role in activating Russian Central Asian politics.[10] N.A. Halfin stated that interest of the tsarism to the region was caused primarily by the launch of capitalist development and search for sources of raw materials and markets. Further on, historian G. Akhmedzhanov evaluated the significance of Halfin findings, but also criticized some of his conclusions, stressing that Halfin overestimated economic needs of the Russian bourgeoisie. "No doubt, strive for new markets was of serious significance in the Russian politics in Central Asia, but it is incorrect to present it as the decisive factor in the Russian regional politics in mid XIX century"[11] Soviet researchers critically assessed English and Russian documents and concluded that before 1980s, Russia expanded in Central Asia to exert pressure on England, and economic aspect grew later.[12]

Contemporary researchers have another opinion of the English-Russian rivalry in the second half of XIX century in the region that was caused by a set of economic, political and military-strategic reasons.[13] Among them was the Russian priorities to re-establish prestige of the empire and balance in the internal relations. Priority of England was in acquisition of new sources of raw materials and markets, spread of the political influence in the regional states. Orientalist G.Y. Sitnyansky stated that in order to understand the specifics of Russian politics in Kazakhstan and the region, one should take into account century long (1815–1907) Anglo-Russian competition in Asia—from Constantinople to Beijing. And the level of competition was so high, that both viewed it as the case of life or death.[14] Therefore, it is important to consider alternative view points in the Russian government expressed by the political, intellectual and military elites in XIX century. For example, it was impossible to provide stability in Tobolsk and Tomsk gubernias without expansion of the Russian borders to Khiva and Kokand, on the other side—not to annex the entire region, but only Kazakh steppes and Kazakh-Kyrgyz Jetusy, not to go beyond Tashkent.[15] G.Y. Sitnyansky referred to the works of M.I. Venukov, and pointed that Russian having started conquest of the region from the Ural and Irtysh rivers could not stop until it reached the borders of Hindukush and Khorassan, as there are no natural barriers nor territories capable to provide living for big masses of the European population; such territories could become natural state borders.[16] In fact such territories were located on the southern borderline of Kazakh steppes in Jetusy. In his other work, the researcher recognized that fact, and defined

a natural southern border of Russian along the line Alma-Ata-Kyrgyz Alatau-Karatau mountains- Pishpek (over Kyzyl-Orda).[17]

To sum up, we emphasize that the regional approach gives an opportunity for researchers to analyze the historical past considering national and regional context. Regional philosophy, as they view,[18] is visibly different from the national one, as it theoretically assesses the problem of mutual relations: center-region, one integral—region. If national philosophy to great extent contains the ideas of unification, progress, dominance of nation, the regional one is mostly concerned with the problem of counterbalance to the center, preservation of its specifics, protection of one's autonomy, in particular. Thematically, the regional tradition compels its proponents to discuss the problem of the path choice, to study the issues of mutual influence of ideologies and cultures. "The regional approach in historical-philosophical research envisions typology of philosophy by regional criteria, orienting to spiritual autonomy of philosophical culture within the framework of definite territorial and historical borders,"—as it is pointed in one of the works of Cherepanov Y.S.[19]

Thus, the regional approach allows involving in historiographical analysis interesting achievements of historical schools that for some time were kept in shadow, and synthesize the merits of large-scale theoretical interpretation of the past with necessary proof of the historical reality. It is impossible to disintegrate the politics of the Russian empire to Kazakhstan from its politics in central Asia in general. Historiography of Kazakhstan and peoples of Central Asia (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzes, Karakalpaks, Tajiks, Turkmens) history studies is so interconnected and interlaid that it is scientifically inconsistent to study them separately.

The peripheral location of Kazakhstan within the Russian empire space created certain economic and political contradictions in its development. No doubt, that Kazakhs and their ancestors within very long time could preserve traditional way of life, and relative political independence. They kept their identity among multi-ethnic population of Jochi ulus. Within the framework of the Russian empire Kazakhs partially preserved their political independence until mid XIX century. The fact that Kazakhs regularly rebelled against the Russian empire proves that annexation of Kazakhstan territory was not voluntary, if considerable social stratas and groups of Kazakh community actively fought against the Russian empire. Practically, within that period was stopped the process of Kazakh statehood buildup. As result of the ousting of Kazakhs from their native lands by the Russian migrants, the Kazakhs faced the real threat to transform into minority on their own homeland, that really happened in XX century.

Notes

- [1] A. Kapeller, *Russia—multinational empire: some considerations eight years after the book publication (In Russian)*, “Ab Imperio” (Kazan), 2001, No. 1, p. 21.
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A b s t r a c t

The author shows, that the regional approach allows involving in historiographical analysis interesting achievements of historical schools that for some time were kept in shadow, and synthesize the merits of large-scale theoretical interpretation of the past with necessary proof of the historical reality. It is impossible to disintegrate the politics of the Russian empire to Kazakhstan from its politics in central Asia in general. Historiography of Kazakhstan and peoples of Central Asia (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyzes, Karakalpaks, Tajiks, Turkmens) history studies is so interconnected and interlaid that it is scientifically inconsistent to study them separately.

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Key words: regional approach, Kazakh history, Russian empire, national identity.