

2026. 13 (4)

Asian Journal

"STEPPE PANORAMA"



ISSN 3135-8055

ISSN 3135-8055 (online)

Құрылтайшысы және баспагері: Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитеті Ш. Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институты ШЖҚ РМК

Ғылыми журнал Қазақстан Республикасы Инвестициялар және даму министрлігінің Байланыс, ақпараттандыру және ақпарат комитетінде 2025 ж. 5 сәуірде тіркелген. Тіркеу нөмірі № KZ91VPY00116246. Жылына 6 рет жарияланады (электронды нұсқада).

Журналда тарих ғылымының *келесі бағыттары* бойынша ғылыми жұмыстар жарияланады: тарих, этнология.

Жарияланым тілдері: қазақ, орыс, ағылшын.

Редакция мен баспаның мекен-жайы:

050010 Қазақстан Республикасы, Алматы қ., Шевченко көш., 28-үй

ҚР ҒЖБМ ҒК Ш. Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институты ШЖҚ РМК

Тел.: +7 (727) 261-67-19, +7 (727) 272-47-59

Журнал сайты: <https://ajspiie.com>

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ISSN 3135-8055 (online)

Учредитель и издатель: РГП на ПХВ «Институт истории и этнологии им. Ч. Ч. Валиханова»
Комитета науки Министерства науки и высшего образования Республики Казахстан

Научный журнал зарегистрирован в Комитете связи, информатизации и информации Министерства по инвестициям и развитию Республики Казахстан, свидетельство о регистрации:

№ KZ91VPY00116246 от 03. 04. 2025 г. Публикуется 6 раз в год (в электронном формате).

В журнале публикуются научные работы *по следующим направлениям* исторической науки: история, этнология.

Языки публикации: казахский, русский, английский.

Адрес редакции и издательства:

050010 Республика Казахстан, г. Алматы, ул. Шевченко, д. 28

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ISSN 3135-8055 (online)

Founder and publisher: RSE on REM"Ch. Ch. Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology" of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The scientific journal is registered at the Committee for Communications, Informatization and Information of the Ministry for Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, registration certificate: No. KZ91VPY00116246 dated 03. 04. 2025. The journal is published 6 times a year (in electronic format).

The journal publishes scientific works in the *following areas* of historical science: history, ethnology.

Publication languages: Kazakh, Russian, English.

Editorial and publisher address:

28 Shevchenko Str., 050010, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

RSE on REM Ch. Ch. Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology CS MSHE of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Tel.: +7 (727) 261-67-19, +7 (727) 272-47-59

Journal website: <https://ajspiie.com>

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ТАРИХ / ИСТОРИЯ / HISTORY

Published in the Republic of Kazakhstan
Asian Journal "Steppe Panorama"
Has been issued as a journal since 2014
ISSN 3135-8055.
Vol. 13. Is. 4, pp. 1155-1174, 2026
Journal homepage: <https://ajspiie.com>

FTAXP / MPHTI / IRSTI 03.20
https://doi.org/10.51943/3135-8055_2026_13_4_1155-1174

RUSSIAN COLONIZATION OF THE KAZAKH STEPPE: HISTORIOGRAPHY ON IMPERIAL EXPANSION AND COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract. Introduction. During the XVIII–XIX centuries, Tsarist Russia increasingly expanded its control over the Kazakh Steppe. Three primary actions were taken within this process: forcing the Kazakh Zhuzes into submission, building military fortresses, and implementing what was referred to as “civil administration.” By the middle of the XIX century the Russian empire had completed the conquest and formally the Steppe became the part of it. Alongside this conquest, Tsarist Russia began to resettle people in the region, which was characterized by agrarian colonization, aggressive land seizure, and the strengthening of imperial control. The legacy of conquest and migration profoundly shaped the ethnic composition and linguistic-cultural identity of modern Kazakhstan. It also provides an important example for the study of colonialism and post-colonialism, showing how an imperial power used military, administrative, and demographic measures to establish and expand control over a nomadic society. Despite the substantial body of historical scholarship on this topic, Chinese studies and sources remain an important resource for understanding Russian imperial policies and actions in the Kazakh Steppe. *Goals and objectives.* This study aims to analyze the main stages of the Russian Empire’s expansion in the Kazakh Steppe and to examine the role of migration policy in consolidating its rule in the region through a review of the relevant historiography, with particular attention to Chinese scholarship. The article focuses on how Russia gradually established control over the Kazakh Zhuzes, constructed military fortresses, introduced administrative systems, and influenced the socio-economic life of the Kazakhs through the arrival of Russian settlers. The article draws on materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the collection “Kazakh-Russian Relations in the XVIII–XIX Centuries,” I. F. Babkov’s memoirs “Memories of My Service in Western Siberia,” the works of Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, and M. A. Terentyev’s “History of the Conquest of Central Asia.” These materials are examined alongside the official chronicle of the Qianlong Emperor’s reign, Qing Gaozong Shilu. This important Qing source contains valuable information on the Kazakh Zhuzes and their relations with neighboring regions of Central Asia, providing an alternative perspective on imperial expansion in the Steppe. The study employs a combination of

historical methods. Authors use the historical-comparative method to analyze different stages of Russian expansion into the Kazakh Steppe and to identify the changing balance between military, administrative, and migration policies. Comparative source analysis allows Russian archival and published materials to be examined alongside Qing documentary evidence, revealing similarities and differences in the interpretation of imperial policies and regional developments. The problem-chronological method is applied to trace the successive stages of Russian penetration into the region, from the establishment of frontier lines and military outposts to the formation of administrative institutions and the implementation of peasant resettlement policies. In addition, historiographical analysis is employed to assess the contribution of Chinese scholarship to the study of Russian colonial expansion in the Kazakh Steppe. Source criticism is used throughout the study to evaluate the origin, context, reliability, and limitations of both Russian and Qing materials. *Results.* The analysis demonstrates that Russian conquest and settlement policies in the Kazakh Steppe constituted an integral component of the Russian Empire's broader strategy of expansion in Central Asia. The examined Russian and Qing sources indicate that the establishment of military lines, administrative reforms, and peasant resettlement policies transformed traditional patterns of land use and significantly altered the socio-economic foundations of Kazakh nomadic society. These measures contributed to the weakening of customary institutions regulating access to pasturelands, increased social differentiation within the steppe population, and facilitated the gradual transition from a predominantly pastoral economy toward more sedentary and agricultural forms of economic activity. *Conclusion.* The historiography of Russian colonization of the Kazakh Steppe reveals that imperial expansion was a gradual and multifaceted process involving military conquest, fortress construction, administrative integration, migration, and social transformation. While Russian, Kazakh, Western, and Chinese scholars emphasize different aspects of these developments, their studies collectively demonstrate the complex nature of colonial rule in the region. The inclusion of Chinese historiography and source materials broadens existing interpretations and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term transformation of the Kazakh Steppe under Russian imperial rule.

Keywords: Tsarist Russia, Kazakh Steppe, conquest, migration policy, colonial expansion, Central Asia, historiography

For citation: Wang Y., Tuleshova U. Zh. Russian Colonization of the Kazakh Steppe: Russian, Kazakh, Western, and Chinese Historiographical Perspectives on Imperial Expansion and Colonial Transformation // Asian Journal "Steppe Panorama". 2026. Vol. 13. No. 4. Pp. 1155–1174. (In Eng.). DOI: 10.51943/3135-8055_2026_13_4_1155-1174

РЕСЕЙДІҢ ҚАЗАҚ ДАЛАСЫН ОТАРЛАУЫ: ИМПЕРИЯЛЫҚ ЭКСПАНСИЯ МЕН ОТАРЛЫҚ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯНЫҢ ТАРИХНАМАСЫ

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Аңдатпа. *Kipicne.* XVIII–XIX ғасырларда патшалық Ресей Қазақ даласына бақылауын біртіндеп күшейтті. Бұл үдеріс аясында үш негізгі шара жүзеге асырылды: қазақ жүздерін бағындыру, әскери бекіністер салу және «азаматтық басқару» деп аталған жүйені енгізу. XIX ғасырдың ортасына қарай Ресей империясы аймақты толық жаулап алып, Дала ресми түрде оның құрамына енді. Жаулап алумен қатар патшалық үкімет өңірге қоныс аудару саясатын жүргізе бастады, бұл аграрлық отарлаумен, жерлерді белсенді түрде тартып алумен және империялық бақылауды күшейтумен қатар жүрді. Жаулап алу мен қоныс аудару саясатының мұрасы қазіргі Қазақстанның этникалық құрамы мен тілдік-мәдени болмысына терең әсер етті. Сонымен қатар бұл үдеріс отаршылдық пен постотаршылдық мәселелерін зерттеу үшін маңызды мысал болып табылады, өйткені ол империялық биліктің көшпелі қоғамды бақылауға алу және өз ықпалын кеңейту мақсатында әскери, әкімшілік және демографиялық тетіктерді қалай пайдаланғанын көрсетеді. Осы тақырып бойынша ауқымды тарихи зерттеулердің болуына қарамастан, қытайлық зерттеулер мен дереккөздер Ресей империясының Қазақ даласындағы саясаты мен іс-әрекеттерін түсіну үшін маңызды ресурс болып қала береді. *Зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақ даласындағы Ресей империясы экспансиясының негізгі кезеңдерін талдау және өңірдегі империялық үстемдікті нығайтудағы қоныс аудару саясатының рөлін қолданыстағы тарихнаманы, әсіресе қытайлық зерттеулерді қарастыру негізінде зерттеу. Мақалада Ресейдің қазақ жүздері үстінен бақылауды қалай біртіндеп орнатқаны, әскери бекіністер салғаны, әкімшілік жүйелер енгізгені және орыс қоныс аударушыларының келуі арқылы қазақтардың әлеуметтік-экономикалық өміріне ықпал еткені қарастырылады. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеудің дереккөздік негізін Қазақстан Республикасы Орталық мемлекеттік архивінің материалдары, «XVIII–XIX ғасырлардағы қазақ-орыс қатынастары» құжаттар жинағы, И. Ф. Бабковтың «Батыс Сібірдегі қызметім туралы естеліктері», Ш. Ш. Уәлихановтың еңбектері және М. А. Терентьевтің «Орта Азияны жаулап алу тарихы» атты еңбегі құрайды. Бұл материалдар Цяньлун императоры билігінің ресми шежіресі – «Цинь Гаоцзун шилу» (Qing Gaozong Shilu) деректерімен салыстыра қарастырылды. Аталған маңызды Цин дәуірінің дереккөзі қазақ жүздері және олардың Орталық Азияның көршілес өңірлерімен байланыстары туралы құнды мәліметтер беріп, Даладағы империялық экспансияға балама көзқарас ұсынады. Зерттеуде тарихи әдістер кешенді түрде қолданылды. Авторлар тарихи-салыстырмалы әдісті пайдалана отырып, Ресейдің Қазақ даласына экспансиясының әртүрлі кезеңдерін талдайды және әскери, әкімшілік әрі қоныс аудару шаралары арасындағы арақатынастың өзгеруін анықтайды. Дереккөздерді салыстырмалы талдау ресейлік архивтік және жарияланған материалдарды Цин дәуірінің құжаттық деректерімен салыстыруға мүмкіндік береді, бұл империялық саясат пен өңірлік үдерістерді түсіндірудегі ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылықтарды айқындауға жағдай жасайды. Проблемалық-хронологиялық әдіс Ресейдің өңірге біртіндеп ену кезеңдерін – шекаралық желілер мен әскери бекіністердің құрылуынан бастап әкімшілік институттардың қалыптасуы мен шаруаларды қоныстандыру саясатының жүзеге асуына дейінгі үдерістерді қарастыру үшін қолданылды. Сонымен қатар, қытай тарихнамасының Қазақ даласындағы Ресейдің отарлық экспансиясын зерттеуге қосқан үлесін бағалау мақсатында тарихнамалық талдау жүргізілді. Зерттеу барысында ресейлік және Цин дәуірінің материалдарының шығу тегі, контексті, сенімділігі мен шектеулерін анықтау үшін дереккөздік сын әдісі пайдаланылды. *Нәтижелер.* Жүргізілген талдау Қазақ даласындағы жаулап алу және қоныстандыру саясаты Ресей империясының Орталық Азиядағы кеңею стратегиясының ажырамас бөлігі болғанын көрсетеді. Зерттелген ресейлік және циндік деректер әскери шептердің құрылуы, әкімшілік реформалардың жүргізілуі және шаруаларды қоныстандыру саясаты дәстүрлі жер пайдалану жүйесін өзгертіп, қазақ көшпелі қоғамының әлеуметтік-экономикалық негіздерін елеулі түрде қайта қалыптастырғанын дәлелдейді. Бұл шаралар жайылымдарға қолжетімділікті реттейтін дәстүрлі институттардың әлсіреуіне, дала халқы арасындағы әлеуметтік жіктелудің күшеюіне және негізінен мал шаруашылығына сүйенген экономиканың біртіндеп отырықшы әрі егіншілік сипаттағы шаруашылық түрлеріне көшуіне ықпал етті. *Қорытынды.* Қазақ даласының Ресей тарапынан

отарлануының тарихнамасы империялық экспансияның әскери, әкімшілік, демографиялық және мәдени факторлардың ықпалымен жүзеге асқан күрделі әрі біртіндеп өрбіген үдеріс болғанын көрсетеді. Ресейлік, қазақстандық, батыстық және қытайлық зерттеулерді салыстыру олардың түсіндірулерінде айырмашылықтардың бар екенін, сонымен қатар отарлық биліктің өңірге тигізген түбегейлі ықпалын ортақ мойындайтынын аңғартады. Қытайлық зерттеулер мен дереккөздерді ғылыми айналымға енгізу тарихнамалық талқылауды байытып, Қазақ даласының отарлық трансформациясын кеңірек әрі жан-жақты түсінуге мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: патшалық Ресей, қазақ даласы, жаулап алу, көші-қон саясаты, отарлық экспансия, Орталық Азия, тарихнама.

Дәйексөз үшін: Ван Я., Төлешова Ұ. Ж. Ресейдің Қазақ даласын отарлауы: империялық экспансия мен отарлық трансформацияның ресейлік, қазақстандық, батыстық және қытайлық тарихнамалық қырлары // Asian Journal "Steppe Panorama". 2026. Т. 13. № 4. 1155–1174 бб. (Ағыл.). DOI: 10.51943/3135-8055_2026_13_4_1155-1174

РОССИЙСКАЯ КОЛОНИЗАЦИЯ КАЗАХСКОЙ СТЕПИ: ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИМПЕРСКОЙ ЭКСПАНСИИ И КОЛОНИАЛЬНОЙ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ

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Аннотация. Введение. В XVIII–XIX веках царская Россия последовательно расширяла свой контроль над Казахской степью. В рамках этого процесса были предприняты три основных шага: подчинение казахских жузов, строительство военных укреплений и внедрение так называемого «гражданского управления». К середине XIX века Российская империя завершила завоевание региона, и степь формально вошла в состав империи. Одновременно с этим царское правительство приступило к переселению населения в регион, что сопровождалось аграрной колонизацией, активным изъятием земель и укреплением имперского контроля. Наследие завоевания и переселенческой политики оказало глубокое влияние на этнический состав и языково-культурную идентичность современного Казахстана. Данный процесс представляет собой важный пример для изучения колониализма и постколониализма, демонстрируя, каким образом имперская власть использовала военные, административные и демографические механизмы для установления и расширения контроля над кочевым обществом. Несмотря на значительный массив исследований по данной проблематике, китайские исследования и источники остаются важным ресурсом для понимания политики и практик Российской империи в Казахской степи. *Цель и задачи исследования.* Целью данного исследования является анализ основных этапов экспансии Российской империи в Казахской степи и рассмотрение роли переселенческой политики в укреплении имперского господства в регионе на основе обзора существующей историографии с особым вниманием к китайским исследованиям. В статье рассматривается, каким образом

Россия постепенно устанавливала контроль над казахскими жузами, строила военные укрепления, внедряла административные институты и оказывала влияние на социально-экономическую жизнь казахов посредством переселения русского населения. В основе исследования лежат материалы Центрального государственного архива Республики Казахстан, сборник документов «Казахско-русские отношения в XVIII–XIX веках», мемуары И. Ф. Бабкова «Воспоминания о моей службе в Западной Сибири», труды Ч. Ч. Валиханова и работа М. А. Терентьева «История завоевания Средней Азии». Данные материалы рассматриваются в сопоставлении с официальной хроникой правления императора Цяньлуна «Цин Гаоцзун шилу» (Qing Gaozong Shilu). Этот важный источник эпохи Цин содержит ценные сведения о казахских жузах и их связях с соседними регионами Центральной Азии, предоставляя альтернативный взгляд на имперскую экспансию в степи. В исследовании применяется комплекс исторических методов. Авторы используют историко-сравнительный метод для анализа различных этапов российской экспансии в Казахскую степь и выявления изменяющегося соотношения военных, административных и переселенческих мер. Сравнительный анализ источников позволяет сопоставить российские архивные и опубликованные материалы с документальными свидетельствами эпохи Цин, выявляя сходства и различия в интерпретации имперской политики и региональных процессов. Проблемно-хронологический метод применяется для прослеживания последовательных этапов российского проникновения в регион — от создания пограничных линий и военных укреплений до формирования административных институтов и реализации политики крестьянского переселения. Кроме того, историографический анализ используется для оценки вклада китайской историографии в изучение российской колониальной экспансии в Казахской степи. На протяжении всего исследования применяется критический анализ источников для оценки происхождения, контекста, достоверности и ограничений как российских, так и цинских материалов. *Результаты.* Проведённый анализ показывает, что политика завоевания и переселения в Казахской степи являлась неотъемлемой частью более широкой стратегии экспансии Российской империи в Центральной Азии. Исследованные российские и цинские источники свидетельствуют о том, что создание военных линий, проведение административных реформ и реализация политики крестьянского переселения трансформировали традиционные формы землепользования и существенно изменили социально-экономические основы казахского кочевого общества. Эти меры способствовали ослаблению традиционных институтов, регулирующих доступ к пастбищам, усилили социальную дифференциацию степного населения и содействовали постепенному переходу от преимущественно скотоводческой экономики к более оседлым и земледельческим формам хозяйственной деятельности. *Заключение.* Историография российской колонизации Казахской степи показывает, что имперская экспансия представляла собой постепенный и сложный процесс, обусловленный военными, административными, демографическими и культурными факторами. Сопоставление российских, казахских, западных и китайских исследований выявляет как различия в интерпретациях, так и общее признание преобразующего воздействия колониального господства на регион. Включение китайских исследований и источников обогащает историографическую дискуссию и позволяет шире взглянуть на процесс колониальной трансформации Казахской степи.

Ключевые слова: царская Россия, Казахская степь, завоевание, переселенческая политика, колониальная экспансия, Центральная Азия, историография

Для цитирования: Ван Я., Тулешова У. Ж. Российская колонизация Казахской степи: российские, казахские, западные и китайские историографические перспективы изучения имперской экспансии и колониальной трансформации // Asian Journal "Steppe Panorama". 2026. Т. 13. № 4. С. 1155–1174. (На англ.). DOI: 10.51943/3135-8055_2026_13_4_1155-1174

Introduction. Before the 17th century, Russia was still largely a landlocked country. In order to gain access to the Baltic Sea, Russia fought a war against Sweden for more than twenty years in the first half of the 18th century; in order to seize the Black Sea, Russia launched more than ten wars

of aggression against the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the main strategic goal of Russian foreign policy was not the Atlantic, but the Indian Ocean. In a letter he wrote just prior to his own death in 1725, Peter the Great expressed his global strategy of competing for dominance in the world when he said, "Get as close as you can to Constantinople and India; whoever controls those regions will control the world. When Persia has declined, proceed through the Persian Gulf; if that is feasible, restore ancient commerce with the Levant (today's Middle East and southern Balkan area) and move onward to India, which is the warehouse of the earth. Once this is achieved, we will no longer need English gold [Li, 1988: 34–58]. Central Asia was the necessary route for Russia to achieve this strategic goal, and the Kazakh Steppe positioned directly between Russia and the khanates of southern Central Asia. Peter the Great attempted to bypass the Kazakh Steppe by advancing southward along two routes on its flanks – the western route along the Caspian Sea and the eastern route along the Irtysh River – but neither succeeded. After failing to advance into Central Asia along these two routes, he chose a third route: moving southward directly through the Kazakh Steppe. He came to recognize that the Kazakh Steppe was the throat and gateway to all Asian countries and territories. Building on Li Jijun's interpretation of Peter I's strategic thinking, it becomes clear that Russia's interest in Central Asia was connected to the broader southern orientation of Russian foreign policy. The evidence presented by Li highlights the importance of Constantinople, Persia, and India in the strategic vision of the Russian state. Within this framework, Central Asia was regarded as an important direction for Russia's advance into Asia, while the Kazakh Steppe occupied a key transit position between the Russian frontier line and the khanates of southern Central Asia (Li, 1988: 34–58). Consequently, Russian authorities viewed the Kazakh Steppe not merely as a remote nomadic frontier, but as a strategic space through which imperial influence could be gradually extended and consolidated. At that time, however, due to wars in the west, Russia was unable to launch a large-scale military invasion of the Kazakh Steppe, and therefore adopted a strategy of gradual encroachment. The gradual expansion of Russian power and the construction of frontier fortifications were among the principal instruments of imperial colonization in the Kazakh Steppe. The step-by-step incorporation of the region into the Russian Empire created a path-dependent process in which each stage of military, administrative, and settlement policies laid the foundation for subsequent colonial transformations. This article examines Russian, Kazakh, and Chinese scholarship on the colonization of the Kazakh Steppe, paying particular attention to the gradual character of Russian imperial expansion and the contribution of Chinese historiography to the study of these processes.

Materials and methods. This study examines the expansion of the Russian Empire into the Kazakh Steppe in the XVIII–XIX centuries, with particular attention to the connection between conquest, administrative control, and migration policy. The source base of the article includes materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, published documents on Kazakh-Russian relations, I. F. Babkov's memoirs "Memories of My Service in Western Siberia", the works of Kazakh intellectuals such as Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, Abay Kunanbayev, and M. A. Terentyev's "History of the Conquest of Central Asia". In addition, "Qing Gaozong shilu", the official chronicle of the Qianlong emperor's reign, is used as a supplementary source for understanding the position of the Kazakh Zhuzes in the wider Central Asian context.

A revealing episode recorded in juan 1094 of the *Qing Gaozong Shilu*, corresponding to the eleventh month of the forty-fourth year of the Qianlong reign, illustrates the position of the Kazakhs within the broader political landscape of Inner Asia. According to the record, a group of Kazakhs who had arrived in the Ili region to trade livestock carried a letter concerning the Kazakh ruler Ablai (Abulebis) and his intention to send his son to Russia [*Qing Gaozong Shilu*, juan 1094, Qianlong 44th year, 11th month]. In the imperial decree, this event was interpreted as evidence of the Kazakhs' intermediate position between the Qing Empire and Russia. As a result, the source allows the Kazakh Steppe to be viewed not only in the context of Russian expansion but also as a space where Qing, Russian, and Kazakh political interests intersected and interacted.

The article combines source analysis with a historical-comparative and problem-chronological approach. These methods are used to compare the main stages of Russian advance into the Steppe, to

trace the transition from frontier control and fortress construction to administrative incorporation and settlement policy. At the same time, the study also reassesses Russian, Kazakhstani, Chinese, and Western historiography in order to show how the same process has been explained from different scholarly perspectives. This issue is significant because Russian expansion into the Kazakh Steppe has been interpreted differently based on national historiographical traditions. Historians of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union have focused primarily on the construction of states, administrative systems or military strategies used to expand into regions such as the Kazakh Steppe. Kazakh historiography paid attention to the loss of political autonomy by their ancestors and the social transformations that took place among them. Western and Chinese scholarship have tended to view the Kazakh Steppes in terms of larger Eurasia and geopolitics. Therefore, it is necessary to synthesize all of the existing interpretations (Russian Empire-Soviet Union, Kazakh, Western, and Chinese) in order to develop a complete and adequate understanding of this subject. Particular attention is given to Chinese historiography and source materials, which remain underutilized in studies of Russian expansion into the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia. By incorporating these perspectives, this article seeks to address an important gap in the existing literature and represents an initial step toward a more integrated and multi-perspective interpretation of the region's colonial history.

The focus of this research is also not limited to immigration as an exclusively social concern within Russian society. The issues of land use limitations and population pressures are certainly relevant; however, these factors alone cannot fully account for why immigration was such a central policy decision in terms of settling the Kazakh Steppe under the Tsarist regime. In addition to serving the needs of immigrants themselves, immigration also had value for the empire. It contributed to the solidification of border areas into the empire; it promoted the expansion of agricultural colonies; and it changed the relationship between the nomadic lifestyle and the sedentary lifestyle of the Kazakhs.

The article is guided by the approaches of imperial history, frontier studies, and colonial studies. However, the main attention paid to "path dependence" in colonial actions of imperial Russia in incorporating the Kazakh steppe through military, administrative and social methods. These perspectives make it possible to examine Russian expansion into the Kazakh Steppe not only as a series of military campaigns, but also as a long process of administrative incorporation, land redistribution, resettlement, and cultural influence. The materials are analyzed through source criticism: archival documents, published collections, memoirs, and historiographical works are compared with attention to their origin, purpose, and historical context.

Discussion. The expansion of the Russian Empire into the Kazakh Steppe has long drawn the attention of historians. Early studies focused largely on Russia's military advance, diplomatic pressure on the Kazakh Zhuzes, the construction of fortress lines, and the gradual erosion of Kazakh political autonomy. M.A. Terentyev's "History of the Conquest of Central Asia" is one of the important works in this tradition, offering detailed accounts of campaigns, fortifications, and the southward shift of Russian power (Terentyev, 1906: 34–38). Therefore, this source is especially useful for tracing the gradual establishment of Tsarist rule across Central Asia and the Kazakh Steppe.

Later research has placed this development into a larger imperial context. Western scholars such as Pierce, Brower, Morrison, and Hosking have suggested that an assessment of the extent of conquest cannot be limited strictly to military aspects alone. According to their arguments, conquest should be viewed as well in the context of the establishment of administrative systems and the eventual inclusion of conquered areas into the empire (Pierce, 1960: 42–45; Brower, 2003: 61–64; Morrison, 2008: 27–31; Hosking, 1997: 218–222). The contribution of these studies lies in moving the discussion beyond a simple narrative of expansion, showing that imperial rule required not only armies and forts, but also laws, officials, administrative categories, and concrete political practices. Such studies offer important theoretical perspectives on the nature of imperial colonization and the reactions of steppe societies to Russian expansion. They incorporate a variety of analytical frameworks, including path dependence, comparative imperial history, and examinations of the similarities and differences between the Russian Empire and other colonial empires.

The other area of study has examined the frontier of the Steppe and how the Russian Empire ruled nomadic communities. Through his analysis of the Russian Steppe frontier, M. Khodarkovsky demonstrates how relationships with nomadic peoples changed as time progressed; from initial diplomatic relations, alliances, tributes, negotiations at an earlier point to reliance and colonial dependency at a later stage (Khodarkovsky, 2002: 176–181). This approach helps explain why Russian control over the Kazakh Steppe was established gradually rather than through immediate conquest. It highlights the path-dependent nature of imperial expansion, as each stage of military, administrative, and settlement policies created the conditions for further advances. Over time, the relatively flexible relations that characterized the frontier were replaced by more formalized and centralized structures of imperial rule.

The research of Virginia Martin provides a third avenue to explore. She examines how Russian rule impacted the development of customary law as practiced by the Kazakh people of the Middle Horde, as well as how Russian rule negatively affected established Kazakh customs and the institutions that supported them (Martin, 2001: 83–88). Similarly, Ian Campbell concentrates his analysis on the intermediary agents of the Kazakh, local knowledge and the day-to-day operations of imperialism in the Steppe (Campbell, 2017: 112–118). Overall, together Martin's and Campbell's analyses demonstrate that Imperial authority was based not only upon visible force or coercion, but also based on legal influence, institutionalized local knowledge, collaboration with select elite within the local population, and over time an evolution of all aspects of every-day politics. These works illustrate how the incorporation of the Kazakh Steppe into the Russian Empire proceeded gradually across different regions. They reveal how imperial institutions and policies were introduced step by step, reshaping the political, legal, and social structures of Kazakh nomadic society and extending imperial influence into various aspects of the traditional steppe system.

George Demko's research on Russian colonization of the Kazakh Steppe is a significant study for how peasants were able to settle and had their land redistribution during the later years of the Russian Empire (Demko, 1969: 55–60). Demko makes it apparent that, settlement was directly connected with the conversion of land use in the Steppe. William Sunderland considers Russian colonization as part of a larger, imperial process. The Empire sought to develop unsettled frontiers into productive, agricultural spaces, which would make these areas more manageable for the State (Sunderland, 2004: 142–147). Moon's research on agriculture and environmental change takes this discussion further. His work shows that the spread of farming altered the ecological conditions of the grasslands – conditions on which nomadic society had traditionally relied (Moon, 2013: 201–207). This point is especially vital, because migration was not simply a demographic or administrative process, it also changed the relationship between people, land, and environment. Brusina and Malikov pay more attention to Slavic settlers, Cossack groups, and the formation of borderland communities in Central Asia and northern Kazakhstan (Brusina, 2001: 74–79; Malikov, 2011: 96–101). Their studies help explain how the imperial presence became rooted in local society through settlement, military service, and everyday frontier life.

Though Soviet scholarship was shaped by specific ideological and theoretical assumptions, many of these works continue to provide valuable insights into the history of the Kazakh Steppe and Russian imperial expansion. For instance, the collection "Materials on the History of the Political System of Kazakhstan", compiled by the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, contains important primary source documents on changes in administrative practice and the destruction of traditional forms of governance (Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, 1960: 45–49). These types of resources are very important in demonstrating how the implementation of imperial reform affected the way Kazakh society organized itself internally, as well as who had authority - the khans, sultans and customary law.

Particularly important for understanding this issue are the writings of Chokan Valikhanov and Abai Kunanbayev, which provide valuable insight into Kazakh intellectual and cultural responses to Russian imperial expansion. As a result of receiving a Russian education, moving among Russian academics, and generally being educated within an imperial context, Chokan Valikhanov's experience illustrates both the opportunities and complexities which existed for Kazakh intellectuals as a new

social class. While Abai Kunanbayev studied Russian literature and education he also thought deeply about the future of Kazakh society (Valikhanov, 1985: 132–136; Kunanbayev, 1970: 58–62). Their writings demonstrate that Russian domination did not occur uniformly, instead of it, there were both inequalities-dominations in response to the presence of Russia. But there were also open channels for cultural-education opportunities to be used by a small number of Kazakh elite.

Taken together, these Kazakhstani materials show that Russian expansion affected Kazakh society not only politically, but also socially and culturally. Kazakhstani historiography usually pays particular attention to the weakening of traditional political structures, changes in land relations, and the pressure created by imperial administrative and migration policies. At the same time, the works of Valikhanov and Kunanbayev help to show how a small part of the Kazakh educated elite responded to these changes in cultural and intellectual life (Valikhanov, 1985: 132–136; Kunanbayev, 1970: 58–62).

A significant yet underutilized body of evidence for the study of Russian colonial expansion in the Kazakh Steppe can be found in Chinese sources and Chinese scholarship. In Kazakh historiography, these materials have generally been examined within the framework of Kazakh–Chinese relations in the 17th to 19th centuries. Nevertheless, Chinese chronicles and historical studies also contain substantial information on Russian imperial activities, the expansion of Russian influence, and the transformation of political relations among the Kazakhs and other Central Asian peoples. Their wider use has the potential to broaden the source base and provide a more balanced understanding of Russian colonialism in the region. Chinese researchers for the most part study Russian actions in Central Asia based on geopolitical and historical perspectives for the entire area of Central Asia as well as through the lens of imperial strategies. Yu Chunling has documented the transformation of Russian policy towards Central Asia throughout the 19th century (Yu, 2004: 45–47) and Meng Nan has focused on how the Russian administration used to function in this geographic area (i.e., their policies and governance) (Meng, 2010: 118–123). Ding Duben, has looked at Russian expansion in terms of the greater history of modern Central Asia (Ding, 2003: 214–219) and Li Shuyun, analyzed the geopolitical rationality that drove Tsarist Russia's move toward Central Asia (Li, 2004: 36–39). These analyses are similar to one another because each analysis views the Kazakh Steppe as interrelated to other geographical areas and to the rivalry between different empires in Central Asia. In Chinese historiography, this issue is often examined not only in terms of Russia's advance into the Kazakh Steppe itself, but also in relation to broader questions of routes, borders, and trade in Central Asia. In his discussion of the southern orientation of Russian policy, Li Jijun explains why the Kazakh Steppe was viewed as a convenient corridor to the Central Asian khanates and, beyond them, to the East (Li, 1988: 34–58). Ding Duben and Li Shuyun place this question within a wider Central Asian context, arguing that the gradual strengthening of Russia's position in the Steppe affected established connections between Xinjiang and Central Asia and influenced the strategic position of the Qing Empire along its northwestern frontier (Ding, 2003: 214–219; Li, 2004: 36–39).

Much of the existing literature provides insight into the role of the Russian Empire within its territorial expansion throughout the Kazakh Steppe. The processes of military conquest, fortress building, administrative reform, changes to the law and immigration have each been studied by researchers working from their own perspective. In addition to these areas there are several that need additional study. A significant portion of the literature has treated military conquest and immigration as distinct and separate elements of the overall process. Therefore, the relationships among military control, administrative reform, land policy and population relocation are at times unclear.

The separation of conquest from colonization has resulted in a limited view of Russian expansion. When the study of conquest is confined to the military and political process of incorporating lands into Russia, then the subsequent changes in land use and social structure of that area could be seen as secondary. Similarly when the causes of migration are viewed only through the lens of internal land shortages or population pressures within Russia, then the role of migration as part of the colonizing process in the Kazakh Steppes would be under estimated. These two processes are interwoven. The creation of military and administrative control over this territory provided the

environment necessary for the settlers, while migration itself helped solidify imperial authority and provide permanence to the presence of Russians throughout this region.

For this reason, the present article discusses conquest and migration within a single framework. Migration is not treated merely as a later consequence of expansion. It is also one of the main means by which the Russian Empire strengthened and maintained its authority over the Kazakh Steppe. Seen in this way, Russian expansion can be understood as a long-term colonial process—one that combined military force, administrative reform, land redistribution, settlement, and cultural influence. At the same time, the article incorporates Chinese historiography and source materials, which provide an important external perspective on these developments and remain underutilized in studies of Russian colonial expansion in the Kazakh Steppe and Central Asia.

Results. In the XVIII century, the Kazakh Steppe became increasingly important in Russia's southward policy. Russia's earlier attempts to approach Central Asia through the Caspian direction and along the Irtysh River did not bring the expected results. After these failures, Russian authorities began to see the Kazakh Steppe as a more direct route toward the khanates of southern Central Asia and further into Asia. Since Russia was still unable to launch a large-scale military campaign in the Steppe at that time, it preferred a gradual policy based on diplomacy, frontier influence, fortress construction, and separate agreements with Kazakh rulers.

Russian influence in the Kazakh Steppe expanded through several connected measures. These included drawing the Kazakh ruling elite into relations of dependence, building military posts on steppe territory, and later introducing new forms of administrative governance (Martin, 2001: 34–39). This policy was closely connected with the internal situation of the Kazakh Khanate. The Kazakh Zhuzes were divided, and at the same time they faced serious pressure from the Dzungar Khanate. Under these conditions, some Kazakh rulers began to look to Russia for military and political support. For the Russian Empire, this created an opportunity to strengthen its position in the region (Moiseev, 1991: 112–118).

As early as 1717, Abulkhair Khan asked Tsar Peter I of Russia for help against the Dzungars. In 1718, Tauke Khan also sent envoys to Peter I, seeking “eternal peace and friendship” with Russia. In response, the Russian government instructed the Siberian governor and the Kalmyk leaders to maintain good relations with the Kazakhs and, if possible, to support them in the event of Dzungar attacks (Suleimenov, Moiseev, 1988: 78–82). These contacts did not yet mean direct Russian rule, but they opened the way for closer political dependence between some Kazakh rulers and the Russian Empire.

The Junior Zhuz was the first Kazakh political group to enter into closer relations with Russia. Its location near the Ural Mountains and the Ural River made contact with Russian authorities more frequent than in other parts of the Steppe. In 1726, a Russian delegate visited Abulkhair Khan on the Karakum Steppe. After this visit, Abulkhair sent a delegation led by Koybagar Kobekov to St. Petersburg and asked for military assistance against the Dzungars. At the same time, tensions between the rulers of the Junior and Middle Zhuzes increased. These internal divisions encouraged Abulkhair to seek Russian support. By the autumn of 1730, he had formally offered allegiance to Russia and opened negotiations with imperial authorities (Suleimenov, Moiseev, 1988: 95–101).

On September 8, 1730, Abulkhair sent a new delegation to St. Petersburg. It was headed by Seitkul Koydagulov and Kutlumbet Koshtayev, who asked Empress Anna Ivanovna to accept the Junior Zhuz under the authority of the Russian Empire. On February 19, 1731, the empress accepted this petition and issued an imperial charter to Abulkhair Khan and “to all the Kazakhs.” Later, on October 10 of the same year, the Russian envoy Tevkelev met with Kazakh leaders, and Abulkhair confirmed his submission to Russia (Campbell, 2017: 47–50).

The position of the Middle Zhuz was more complicated. Abulkhair and Tevkelev tried to persuade Sameke Khan to pledge allegiance to Russia. Sameke Khan initially agreed, but this agreement was unstable. Opposition to Russia soon appeared among leaders of the Middle Zhuz. Barak Khan and other regional rulers rejected Russian demands, fearing the loss of freedom and political independence. At the same time, renewed Dzungar attacks again forced some Kazakh rulers

to seek Russian support. Sameke Khan later sent envoys to Ufa to express his loyalty to Russia (Terentyev, 1906: 107–110). These events show that Kazakh-Russian relations in the first decades of the XVIII century were not simply one-sided. Kazakh khans were not passive subjects of Russian policy; they also tried to use Russian support according to their own political needs.

The Senior Zhuz had a different position. It did not share a direct border with the Russian Empire, but the construction of Orenburg increased Russian influence over the Steppe as a whole. In letters to the Russian government, Zholbarys Khan expressed his willingness to establish relations with Russia. However, his main interest was connected with trade through Orenburg rather than full political submission. On September 19, 1738, Empress Anna Ivanovna signed a decree allowing the inclusion of the Senior Zhuz into the Russian Empire. In practice, however, Zholbarys Khan did not intend to place the Senior Zhuz under real Russian sovereignty, so this act remained largely formal (Khafizova, 2019: 63–67).

By the mid-XVIII century, the Junior and Middle Zhuzes had formally pledged allegiance to Russia, but this allegiance was still mostly symbolic, because the Kazakhs continued to live as nomads and remained under the authority of their own khans. Qing materials allow us to clarify this conclusion. Juan 1094 of the Qing Gaozong Shilu records a letter concerning the Kazakh ruler Abulebis and his intention to send his son to Russia (Qing Gaozong Shilu, Juan 1094, Qianlong 44th year, 11th month). The imperial decree noted that the Kazakhs had already acknowledged Qing authority, while at the same time maintaining political ties with Russia as a powerful neighboring state. This episode illustrates the position of the Kazakh rulers between two competing imperial centers. It also suggests that formal allegiance to Russia did not necessarily imply complete incorporation into the Russian imperial system. The Russian government had not yet established a stable administrative system in the Steppe and did not collect taxes from the Kazakhs on a regular basis (Martin, 2001: 41–44). At this stage, Russian influence relied mainly on diplomatic pressure, separate agreements, frontier contacts, and the gradual construction of dependence, rather than on direct colonial administration.

The second measure in Russia's advance into the Kazakh Steppe was the construction of military fortifications. While accepting the formal submission of some Kazakh rulers, Russia also sought to strengthen its control over the Steppe and continue its southward expansion. For this purpose, it began to build military fortresses on Kazakh pastoral lands. In 1724, Ivan Kirilov, an official of the Governing Senate, proposed several measures for the management of the Kazakh Steppe. These included opening a trade route from Russia to Central Asia, developing navigation on the Aral Sea, and establishing commercial and political ties with the Central Asian khanates. Kirilov also suggested building a fortress on the Or River, which later became the basis for the Orenburg fortress. In his view, such fortresses would help Russia control the Kazakhs and serve as bases for future movement toward southern Central Asia (Khodarkovsky, 2002: 172–176; Sunderland, 2004: 68–72). Ding Duben and Li Shuyun likewise connect this issue to the southern orientation of Russian policy. In their interpretation, Russian fortifications in the Steppe served not only as defensive structures along the frontier but also as strategic bases supporting further expansion into Central Asia (Ding, 2003: 214–219; Li, 2004: 36–39). From this perspective, Orenburg and the successive lines of fortifications established along the Ural, Ishim, and Irtysh rivers illustrate how a military presence gradually evolved into a more permanent form of Russian influence and control in the Kazakh Steppe.

From that time onward, Russia gradually built fortifications on Kazakh pastoral lands along the Ural, Ishim, and Irtysh rivers. Beginning with Tobolsk, which had developed from the former capital of the Siberian Khanate, Russia expanded its line of fortresses over a long period. On the Irtysh line, Yamyshyev was built in 1715 and rebuilt in 1716 after its destruction by the Dzungars; Omsk was founded in 1716, Zhelezinsk in 1717, Semipalatinsk in 1718, and Ust-Kamenogorsk in 1720. These fortresses became the first military strongholds of Russian advance into the territory of present-day Kazakhstan and later formed the basis of the Irtysh military line (Pierce, 1960: 35–41; Sunderland, 2004: 73–79).

The construction of these fortresses marked the beginning of a more active Russian colonial presence in the Kazakh Steppe. Ust-Kamenogorsk, for example, was established near Lake Zaysan,

close to the Qing border; in Qing sources this area was known as Duigertula. Through the fortress lines, Tsarist Russia gradually expanded its control over the Steppe. At the same time, the protection and maintenance of these lines required a growing Russian population in the region. Citing "land shortage" and "rural overpopulation" in Russia, as well as the claim that Kazakh nomads had not made "rational use" of the Steppe, the imperial authorities began to encourage Russian settlement. In this way, fortress construction became closely connected with the later migration of Russians into the Kazakh Steppe (Demko, 1969: 35–42; Moon, 2013: 188–193; Sunderland, 2004: 96–101).

The construction of fortifications on Kazakh pastoral lands caused strong resistance among the Kazakhs. In 1743, Kazakh groups raided Russian border settlements. In 1744, they attacked the Russian frontier, seized a caravan travelling from Astrakhan to Khiva, and detained Lieutenant Gladishev, who was travelling from Orenburg to the Karakalpaks. In response, Russian authorities tried to use neighbouring peoples, including the Torguts, Kalmyks, and Bashkirs, against the Kazakhs. In 1734, the Russian Foreign Affairs Committee instructed Kirilov that, in times of unrest, one people should be used against another in order to preserve Russian strength. This policy weakened Kazakh resistance and pushed Kazakh groups farther away from the defensive lines (Suleimenov, Moiseev, 1988: 118–121; Khodarkovsky, 2002: 181–184; Martin, 2001: 49–52).

At first, many Russian fortresses were separate strongholds built along rivers and were not yet connected with one another. They could not fully prevent Kazakh movements to the north or stop attacks on Russian caravans. In the early XVIII century, however, the forts along the Irtysh were gradually joined into the Siberian fortress line, stretching from Omsk to Ust-Kamenogorsk. During the 1730s–1750s, another line developed along the Ural River, including Guryev, Uralsk, Orenburg, and Orsk. Later, these lines were linked through Petropavlovsk and Omsk, creating a long chain of fortifications from the northern Caspian region to Ust-Kamenogorsk. After this system was formed, Russian control over the border zone became stronger, and Kazakh raids were increasingly restricted (Pierce, 1960: 36–41; Sunderland, 2004: 73–79).

This n-shaped fortress line not only marked a new border zone between Russia and the Kazakh Steppe, but also became a base for further southward expansion. In the 1820s, Russia began to introduce the third measure in the Steppe — the so-called "civil administration." Russian officials believed that the political independence of the Middle and Junior Zhuzes could be finally weakened only through new administrative regulations (Martin, 2001: 53–58; Campbell, 2017: 57–62). In 1820, the Russian government established the Asian Committee, and soon after that began to prepare a series of statutes for the Kazakh Steppe. These statutes were intended, first, to bring the Kazakh nomads into the Russian administrative system, and second, to divide the Steppe into smaller administrative units, making imperial rule easier to enforce (Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, 1960: 52–57; Campbell, 2017: 63–67). From this viewpoint, administrative reforms were significant not only for the internal governance of the Steppe. As Chinese scholars have noted, the strengthening of Russian authority in Central Asia gradually altered the position of neighboring frontier regions, including Xinjiang and territories connected to the Qing Empire (Ding, 2003: 214–219; Li, 2004: 36–39). The introduction of districts, volosts, and auls can therefore be seen as marking a transition from the formal allegiance of the Kazakhs to a more stable and institutionalized form of Russian control over the Steppe, which had previously functioned as a zone of interaction among the Kazakhs, Russia, and the Qing Empire.

In the early XIX century, M. M. Speransky, acting on the orders of the imperial government, collected materials on Kazakh customary law and adapted them to the needs of Russian administration. In 1822, he prepared the "Statute on the Siberian Kirghiz," also known as the Speransky Statute (Martin, 2001: 61–66; Pierce, 1960: 48–51). This statute created a new colonial administrative structure in the Steppe. The traditional authority of khans was replaced by districts, volosts, and auls, which were placed under Russian supervision. Local leaders could still hold certain positions, but their decisions increasingly depended on approval from Russian officials (Martin, 2001: 67–73; Campbell, 2017: 68–74).

In 1838, Russia introduced the "Statute on the Separate Administration of the Siberian Kirghiz," which revised the 1822 statute and strengthened military-administrative control over the Steppe. The

new system placed the Kazakhs under the authority of the Border Administration of the Siberian Kirghiz, with its centre in Omsk. Most senior posts were held by Russian officials, while Kazakh representatives were allowed only limited participation in local administration (Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, 1960: 61–65; Martin, 2001: 74–78).

In 1842, the Russian authorities issued the Orenburg Kazakh Statute for the Junior Zhuz. The territory of the Junior Zhuz was placed under the supervision of the Orenburg administration and divided into eastern and western parts. Each part included several volosts, which were further divided into auls. Auls were headed by Kazakh elders, while larger administrative units were supervised by officials approved by the Russian authorities. In this way, the Russian government gradually replaced the older political structure of the Zhuzes with a new administrative order based on imperial control (Pierce, 1960: 52–55; Campbell, 2017: 75–80).

On the territory of the Senior Zhuz, Russia built administrative centers such as Kopal. Under the jurisdiction of these administrative centers, the Kazakhs of the Senior Zhuz were required to pay taxes and service fees to Russia every year. In January 1848, Russia promulgated a legislative statute for the Senior Zhuz, the "Statute on the Administration and Nomadic System of the Kirghiz of the Senior Zhuz." This statute provided for the establishment of a police force under the jurisdiction of the Governor-General of Siberia in order to maintain local order (Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, 1960: 78–81; Pierce, 1960: 56–58). In May 1854, Russia separated the southern part of the Kazakh Steppe, established Semipalatinsk Oblast, and promulgated the "Statute on the Administration of Semipalatinsk Oblast," appointing a Governor-General to administer it directly, while the local chief of the Senior Zhuz served only as his deputy (CSA RK. F. 64. Inv. 1. Book 1. C. 63).

The implementation of various statutes and the establishment of new policies gradually made the Russian government apparatus replace the Kazakh Khanate system, which had existed for more than three hundred years. The introduction and implementation of the "Statute on the Siberian Kirghiz" and the "Orenburg Kazakh Statute" marked the completion of Russia's major acquisition of the Kazakh Steppe. However, the enforcement of these laws also met with resistance from the Kazakhs. After the enactment of these statutes, numerous uprisings against Russian authority occurred among the Kazakh population; even members of the Kazakh nobility resisted the new order (Martin, 2001: 88–93; Campbell, 2017: 84–86).

Kazakh rulers were formally recognized as Russian subjects in the XVIII and early XIX centuries. However, the gradual transformation of Kazakh places of residence against their will caused strong resistance, and many Kazakhs took up arms during this period. Due to divisions among the Kazakhs, however, this resistance was ultimately unsuccessful. As a result, the Kazakhs lost their independence, and the Kazakh Steppe was gradually incorporated into Russian territory (Olcott, 1995: 41–46; Campbell, 2017: 84–86).

Russia's transition to imperial expansion did not pass through a bourgeois-democratic revolution. The political and economic systems of Russia at that time still contained strong elements of medieval feudal and autocratic rule. This social nature made the movement of Tsarist Russia into the Kazakh Steppe not simply an ethnic migration, but a political, economic, and cultural invasion with clear colonial characteristics (Sabol, 2003: 39–45; Sunderland, 2004: 96–101).

The incorporation of the Kazakh Steppe into the Russian Empire was not a simple or voluntary process. It was closely connected with military pressure, the weakening of traditional political structures, the construction of fortress lines, and the gradual spread of imperial administration. Russian rule in the Steppe therefore had a clear colonial character: it limited the autonomy of the Kazakh Zhuzes, changed land relations, and created new forms of dependence on the empire (Sabol, 2003: 39–45).

Politically, Tsarist Russia took advantage of Abulkhair Khan's need for support and of divisions among Kazakh rulers. It expanded its influence through fortress lines, separate negotiations with sultans, and the gradual introduction of administrative reforms. This policy weakened the unity of the Kazakh Khanate and limited the political autonomy of the Zhuzes. The adoption of the "Statute on the Siberian Kirghiz" in 1822 marked an important stage in this process, as it replaced the old khanate

authority with a new administrative order under Russian control (Suleimenov, Moiseev, 1988: 118–121; Martin, 2001: 49–52).

Economically, using the pretext that there were many “unused” or “surplus” lands in the Kazakh Steppe, Tsarist Russia seized the lands of the nomadic population and handed them over to Russian settlers for cultivation. Large areas of pasture were turned into arable land, and the local livestock economy was severely damaged. To meet the needs of colonial rule, Tsarist Russia imposed various taxes on the Kazakh people and exploited local resources on a large scale through the construction of railways, factories, and other colonial infrastructure (Demko, 1969: 55–60; Moon, 2013: 201–207). Qing sources provide a broader perspective on the importance of Kazakh pastures and pastoralism beyond the internal economy of the Steppe. For example, Juan 779 of the *Qing Gaozong Shilu* records that Kazakhs drove horses, cattle, and sheep to Ush and the Ili region for trade, and that livestock obtained through this exchange played an important role in supplying Qing forces stationed in Ili (*Qing Gaozong Shilu*, juan 779, Qianlong 32nd year, 2nd month). From this kind of view, the appropriation of pasturelands and the expansion of Russian settlements affected not only the economic foundations of Kazakh nomadic society but also the long-established commercial connections between the Steppe and Xinjiang. Culturally, in order to facilitate colonial rule and promote Russification among the conquered Kazakhs, Tsarist Russia first established schools in the Kazakh Steppe. The earliest unofficial schools in the Steppe were founded by Russian military settlers and Cossacks to educate their own children; therefore, they had little direct influence on the indigenous population. Later, some language schools were opened to train translators, clerks, and other low-ranking officials for the colonial authorities. However, these schools mainly admitted the sons of sultans and children of Kazakh nobles. Their purpose was to control and win over Kazakh chiefs, nobles, and religious figures, so that they would assist the Russian authorities in governing the Steppe. Therefore, the aim of establishing education in the Steppe was not simply to spread knowledge among the Kazakh population, but also to serve the political purpose of colonial administration. In his poetry, the famous Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbayev criticized the fact that Russian schools were not established primarily to enlighten the Kazakh people or develop Kazakh culture, but to serve the needs of colonial rule (Brower, 2003: 77–82; Olcott, 1995: 47–51; Kunanbayev, 1970: 58–64).

Secondly, Tsarist Russia also promoted Russification through religious policy, since Islamic education occupied an important place in Kazakh cultural life. Competition with Islamic institutions for influence over the population became one of the means by which the imperial authorities sought to strengthen their position in the Steppe. The Russian authorities adopted a policy of both using and restricting Islam. In 1867, the Special Steppe Committee of the Russian Empire stated in its report: “The influence of the mullahs should be limited, and they should not be allowed to educate the young Kirghiz. By this means, not only can the power of Islam in the Steppe be weakened, but they can also be made, more or less, closer to the Russians.” In addition, Russian officials believed that the Kazakhs were less firmly attached to Islam than other Central Asian peoples, and therefore encouraged the spread of Eastern Orthodoxy in the Kazakh Steppe. They regarded conversion to Christianity as a way to bring the Kazakhs closer to the Russian population. For this purpose, the authorities used various incentives, including preferential policies in land grants and other areas, to encourage conversion (Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, 1960: 78–81; Brower, 2003: 77–82).

The early colonization of the Kazakh Steppe by Tsarist Russia developed in two connected stages. The first stage was based on the armed occupation of new territories with the help of Cossack forces, while the second stage was connected with the migration of Russian settlers into the Kazakh Steppe. In both cases, imperial policy clearly favored the Russian population and ignored the interests of the indigenous Kazakhs (Sunderland, 2004: 96–101; Sabol, 2003: 39–45).

The Kazakh Steppe was conquered by Tsarist Russia largely through military means. In order to consolidate the newly acquired lands, the tsarist government first sent Cossack units into the region. The Cossacks were originally Russian peasants who had fled from oppression in the central regions of Russia to the frontier areas between the XV and XVII centuries, and later became an important military force of the empire. From the XVIII century onward, they were often used by the tsarist

government as an instrument of expansion and war. In 1797 and 1798, in order to suppress Kazakh resistance, the Orenburg authorities sent a large force of Ural Cossacks into the Kazakh Steppe. From that time on, the Kazakhs were pushed deeper into the Steppe under pressure from the Cossacks (Sunderland, 2004: 73–79; Martin, 2001: 49–52).

In 1822, the tsarist government enacted the "Statute on the Siberian Kirghiz." The statute stated that internal guard detachments in each district could be formed from Line Cossack units located in district administrative centers, from Cossack detachments sent there, or from Cossack units stationed there for a long period. In this way, the statute created a legal basis for the permanent presence of armed Cossack forces in the Kazakh Steppe (Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, 1960: 66–69; Martin, 2001: 79–82).

As tsarist power in the Kazakh Steppe became further consolidated, migrants, mainly Russians, began to appear in the region. Most of them were peasants, as well as people who had moved to the frontier for various reasons, and the government settled them in large numbers on seized lands. These Slavic migrants were useful to the tsarist government: first, they helped consolidate the occupied territories and promote Russification among the local population; second, they made it possible for the empire to exploit local resources more effectively. Therefore, the tsarist authorities introduced preferential policies in favor of Russian migrants. On the pretext that the Kazakh Steppe had originally belonged to several tribes, after its conquest the land was transferred to state ownership. According to the 1891 "Statute on the Administration of the Steppe Provinces," "all lands possessed by the nomads, including forests, shall be regarded as state lands" (Demko, 1969: 55–60; Moon, 2013: 201–207).

Russian settlers moved deep into the Steppe and occupied land, while the authorities pursued a policy toward the Kazakhs that combined repression with appeasement. By moving large numbers of Russians into the Kazakh Steppe, Tsarist Russia gradually strengthened its rule over the region. The Chief of Staff of the Turkestan Military District stated bluntly in his report: "I must point out that one day they themselves will openly acknowledge and willingly accept our cause. This is entirely for the benefit of the Russian nation. All the land of the Kirghiz, that is, the Kazakhs, is not their own land, but Russian land. All enterprises, institutions, or buildings constructed here by Russian residents are for the needs of the state. Just as Russia, after building defensive fortresses in the Orenburg Steppe, pushed the Steppe population toward better pastures and winter pastures, after Russians settle here, they should push them, that is, the original Kazakh inhabitants, out of the border area or remove them entirely" (Demko, 1969: 61–66; Sabol, 2003: 39–45).

Second, investigation groups were sent to identify "unused" and "surplus" lands in the Kazakh Steppe. The 1891 "Statute on the Administration of the Steppe Provinces" stipulated that "all land that may be surplus for the nomads shall be placed under the administration of the Ministry of State Property." In 1893, the Russian authorities established the Akmolinsk Temporary Commission, which expanded migrant settlement activity to Omsk and Petropavlovsk districts, and later to Kokchetav district and Semipalatinsk province. Between 1893 and 1895, this commission confiscated 624,000 desyatinas of the best cultivated land from the Kazakhs of Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk provinces. In 1896, the Russian authorities formed a special economic expedition headed by Shcherbina. In order to identify surplus land and establish migrant settlement bases, the expedition investigated twelve districts in Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, and Turgay provinces. By 1909, the expedition had designated 22.592 million desyatinas of land as surplus in the eight districts it had investigated (CSA RK. F. 64. Inv. 1. Book 1. C. 32; Demko, 1969: 55–60; Moon, 2013: 201–207).

In practice, these officials "discovered" that the Kazakhs and Kirghiz allegedly did not need large areas of land, and recommended that Tsarist Russia allocate these lands to incoming Russian migrants for cultivation. In reality, with the conquest and the influx of large numbers of Slavic migrants, many fertile pastures and lands of the local indigenous population were seized. In the process of collecting land for migrants, the authorities not only confiscated the so-called "surplus land" of the original inhabitants by force, but also obtained land through negotiations with local large landowners, the *bais*. In 1910, a law was enacted that required nomads to transfer "surplus" land to the migrant settlement fund (Demko, 1969: 55–60; Moon, 2013: 201–207).

Pastoral and cultivated lands of the Kazakhs were confiscated by the government, including lands with irrigation systems, and were then turned into migrant settlement areas. The land was allocated to Russian settlers. To encourage settlement, the government granted them tax exemptions and long-term exemption from military service. They could also receive financial aid in the form of loans. For example, settlers were given farming equipment and cattle so that they could establish their households and begin agricultural production. The local peoples of the Kazakh Steppe did not enjoy these benefits. On the contrary, they had to pay various taxes, such as the tent tax, and perform labor obligations, including building roads and bridges, constructing fortresses, transporting military supplies, and building irrigation works for Russian colonial military-agricultural settlements (Demko, 1969: 55–60; Moon, 2013: 201–207).

In his report, Kaufman, the Governor-General of Syr Darya province, wrote: "The best land suitable for farming was allocated to the Cossacks, while to the Kirghiz, that is, the Kazakhs, regardless of their rights and regardless of whether their needs were taken into account, land outside the cultivated areas was allocated, including wasteland with ditches that required enormous labor, and they were deprived of winter pastures that were completely useless to the Kazakhs" (Sabol, 2003: 39–45; Demko, 1969: 61–66). In addition, in order to defend themselves against the local population, it was stipulated that every Russian migrant household should have at least one gun. Some Black-Hundred groups and reactionary officials called the peoples of the Kazakh Steppe "descendants of Genghis Khan and Timur the Lame," and argued that they should be treated in the same way as Indigenous peoples in the United States (Sabol, 2003: 39–45). The tsarist government pursued a policy of Great Russian chauvinism and clearly favored Russian migrants in the Kazakh Steppe. This provoked resistance among the peoples of the Steppe and became one of the historical causes of later conflicts between Kazakhs and Russian migrants (Sabol, 2003: 39–45; Sunderland, 2004: 112–118).

The results of Russian migration to the Kazakh Steppe were far-reaching. The arrival of large numbers of migrants changed the ethnic structure of the Steppe region, the pattern of land distribution, and the economic and cultural life of the local inhabitants. The land forcibly seized by the government was not only pastureland; part of it also included cultivated land used by Kazakhs and Kirghiz. Many local people were driven from their homes by the authorities, and such actions directly violated their interests. As a result, many Kazakhs and Kirghiz became displaced, and some of them moved toward the Chinese borderlands (CSA RK. F. 64. Inv. 1. Book 1. C. 11; Sabol, 2003: 46–52).

At the same time, the seizure of large areas of land and the harsh nature of tsarist colonial rule caused serious suffering among the local population. Ethnic tensions intensified, and anti-colonial uprisings against Russian rule broke out one after another. The Zhanqozha uprising of 1856–1857 was directed against the relocation of large numbers of Cossacks into the fertile Syr Darya Valley and the forced removal of Kazakhs from fertile lands to more barren areas. The uprising was later suppressed by tsarist forces (Sabol, 2003: 39–45; Demko, 1969: 61–66).

The Eset uprising of 1853–1858 was connected with the demand of the Russian authorities that the Shekti Kazakh tribe, living west of the Aral Sea, provide 4,000 camels for military transport. The Shekti refused this demand, after which the Governor-General of Orenburg ordered troops to suppress them. Under the leadership of Eset, the Kazakhs of the Shekti tribe resisted, but the uprising was eventually crushed by Russian forces. Prolonged economic exploitation and political oppression by Tsarist Russia gradually weakened the economic and social structure of Kazakh society, damaged the foundations of nomadic life, and opened the region to Russian economic interests (Sabol, 2003: 39–45; Demko, 1969: 61–66).

At that time, although Russia lagged behind the capitalist countries of Western Europe, it still possessed economic, military, and administrative advantages over the indigenous population of the Kazakh Steppe. Therefore, Russian colonial expansion also brought certain changes connected with new forms of production, administration, and education. Engels noted that, despite the oppressive character of Russian rule, it also had a certain "civilizing effect" in the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia (Marx and Engels, 1972: 241).

Russia's conquest of Central Asia introduced, to some extent, European forms of production, as well as new elements of culture, science, and technology. With the establishment of closer contacts,

some local agricultural groups became familiar with new farming tools, including iron ploughs, mowing machines, and harrows, and began to learn new methods of cultivation. They gradually began to grow and consume crops such as potatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Migrants also influenced nomadic communities, who over several decades became more familiar with fodder storage, mowing techniques, and the use of the scythe. These changes contributed to the growth of agricultural practices among some nomads and influenced the pace of sedentarization (Moon, 2013: 208–214; Demko, 1969: 67–72).

Although Russian cultural policy in the Kazakh Steppe served imperial interests and often conflicted with local traditions, it also created limited channels through which some Kazakh intellectuals became acquainted with Russian and European education. Chokan Valikhanov, for example, studied at the Siberian Cadet Corps and later entered Russian academic circles. Abai Kunanbayev, although he did not receive a formal Russian-style education, engaged deeply with Russian literature and encouraged the study of the Russian language among the Kazakh population. These examples show the contradictory nature of Russian influence: it opened new educational opportunities for a small group of Kazakh elites, but it did not remove the harm caused by colonial rule in the Steppe (Valikhanov, 1985: 132–138; Kunanbayev, 1970: 58–64; Olcott, 1995: 52–56).

Conclusion. The historiography of Russian expansion into the Kazakh Steppe demonstrates that the incorporation of the region into the Russian Empire cannot be understood as the result of a single military conquest. Russian, Kazakh, Western, and Chinese scholars have shown that this process unfolded gradually over more than a century through a combination of military expansion, the construction of fortress lines, administrative reforms, political integration, migration policies, and cultural intervention. Considered together, these measures formed a long-term colonial strategy that progressively transformed the political, social, and economic foundations of Kazakh society.

A review of the existing scholarship also highlights the path-dependent character of Russian colonial expansion. Early military and diplomatic initiatives created conditions for subsequent administrative reforms, settlement policies, and mechanisms of imperial governance. In this context, migration should not be viewed merely as a consequence of conquest. Rather, historiographical studies increasingly demonstrate that settlement policies constituted an integral component of the colonial project, reinforcing imperial control and accelerating the transformation of land relations and traditional patterns of nomadic life.

At the same time, significant differences remain among historiographical traditions. Russian and Soviet scholarship has often emphasized state-building, frontier management, and administrative integration, whereas Kazakh historians have focused on the loss of political autonomy and the social consequences of colonial rule. Western studies have generally approached the region within broader frameworks of empire and colonialism. Chinese historiography and source materials, however, provide an important yet still underutilized perspective on these developments. Chinese chronicles and scholarly works place Russian expansion within a wider Eurasian context and offer valuable evidence for understanding the changing balance of power in Central Asia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The incorporation of Chinese scholarship into the historiography of Russian colonialism in the Kazakh Steppe broadens the source base available to researchers and contributes to a more comprehensive interpretation of imperial expansion. By bringing together Russian, Kazakh, Western, and Chinese perspectives, this article highlights the gradual and interconnected nature of conquest, migration, political integration, and social transformation in the colonial history of the Kazakh Steppe.

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ASIAN JOURNAL "STEPPE PANORAMA"

2026. 13(4)

Бас редактор:

Қабылдинов З. Е.

Компьютерде беттеген:

Ағзам Р. Р.

Құрылтайшысы және баспагері:

Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитеті

Ш. Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институты ШЖҚ РМК

Редакция мен баспаның мекен-жайы:

050010, Қазақстан Республикасы, Алматы қ., Шевченко көш., 28-үй

ҚР ҒЖБМ ҒК Ш. Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институты ШЖҚ РМК

Журнал сайты: <https://ajspiie.com>

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