

## History of the colonization of the Kazakh steppe by the Russian Empire (XVIII-XIX) \*

## Historia de la colonización de la estepa kazaja por el Imperio Ruso (XVIII-XIX)

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**Abstract:** The colonization of Kazakh lands by the Russian Empire in the XVIII-XIX centuries had a determining influence on the formation of modern Kazakhstan. A deep understanding of the colonial past is important for comprehending modern problems of Kazakhstan. The aim is to give a holistic picture of the process of colonization of Kazakh lands, with a focus on the view and role of the Kazakh people. The strategic, geopolitical and economic motives of the expansion are revealed, and the periodization of the colonization of Kazakh lands is given. The methods of establishing control, colonization, and management strategies are analysed.

**Keywords:** Central Asia; military advancement; khan dynasties; Kazakh resistance; Russification.

**Resumen:** La colonización de las tierras kazajas por el Imperio ruso en los siglos XVIII y XIX tuvo una influencia determinante en la formación del Kazajstán moderno. Una comprensión profunda del pasado colonial es importante para comprender los problemas modernos de Kazajstán. El objetivo es ofrecer una imagen holística del proceso de colonización de las tierras kazajas, centrándose en la visión y el papel del pueblo kazajo. Se revelan los motivos estratégicos, geopolíticos y económicos de la expansión y se da la periodización de la colonización de las tierras kazajas. Se analizan los métodos de establecimiento de estrategias de control, colonización y gestión.

**Palabras clave:** Asia Central; avance militar; dinastías khan; resistencia kazaja; rusificación.

**Sumario:** Introduction. 1. Theoretical overview. 2. Materials and methods. 3. Results. 4. Discussion. Conclusions. References.

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## INTRODUCTION

The colonization of the Kazakh steppe by the Russian Empire in the XVIII-XIX centuries is one of the defining periods in the history of Kazakhstan. For many centuries, the nomadic Kazakh people inhabited vast steppe meadows, uniting into three hordes. Which roamed together with their livestock. This way of life was fundamentally disrupted by the expansion of Tsarist Russia into Central Asia. The colonization of the Kazakh steppe eventually led to the Kazakhs' loss of sovereignty and radical changes in society and culture. Given such profound consequences, the study of this period is crucial to understanding modern Kazakhstan. However, the most common narratives often fail to take into account Kazakh perspectives and experiences.

Russian primary sources contain extensive documentation but present a one-sided imperialist view. Western scholarship has also largely focused on Russian motives and policies, while the role and history of Kazakhstan remains understudied. This study aims to address these gaps by focusing

on the role and influence of Kazakhs during the colonization period. Primary sources include Russian archival documents, but particular attention is paid to identifying Kazakh testimonies, records, and scholarly views. Several key questions underpin the study: what was the impetus for Russian expansion into the Kazakh steppe? What were the main economic, political and military motivations? How did Russia establish control over the region? What colonization strategies and governing policies were imposed? How did the Kazakh tribes and chiefs initially respond? What forms of negotiation, concessions and resistance took place? How did Russian colonization change Kazakh society, culture, economy, and sovereignty over time? What are the long-term consequences and legacies of Russian imperialism in Kazakhstan? By exploring these questions from a Kazakh perspective, this study provides a more balanced picture. It emphasizes the ability and resilience of the Kazakh people to respond to colonial subjugation. The study draws on scholarship on Russian and Central Asian colonialism, while at the same time challenging prevailing Russian-centred narratives. The findings provide new insights into the contentious process of colonization, the strategies of negotiation and resistance of the Kazakhs, and the formation of a unified Kazakh national identity.

Ulan Zhangaliev and Kalamkas Bolatova examine the influence of the policy of tsarist Russia on the structure of traditional Kazakh society in the 18th-19th centuries<sup>1</sup>. The authors show that this policy had a significant impact on various spheres of life of Kazakh society. However, the article does not sufficiently consider the regional peculiarities of this influence in detail. In the study by Galina Ksenzhiik and Dosaly Salkynbek review and classify Russian cartographic materials on the history of Kazakhstan in the XVIII-XIX centuries<sup>2</sup>. The authors reasonably argue that these materials are an important historical source. However, the article does not indicate specific problems associated with the use of these cartographic materials.

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<sup>1</sup> ZHANGALIEV, Ulan Kurmetkalievich, BOLATOVA, Kalamkas Bolatovna, “In the XVIII-XIX century and the policy of tsarist Russia in Kazakhstan, consequences of influence on the structure of traditional Kazakh society”, in *Bulletin “Historical and Socio-Political Sciences”*, vol. 1, 64 (2021). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51889/2020-1.1728-5461.10>

<sup>2</sup> KSENZHIK, Galina Nikolaevna, SALKYNBEK, Dosaly Isakhanuly, “Overview and classification of Russian cartographic materials of the XVIII-XIX centuries. By the history of Kazakhstan”, in *Bulletin “Historical and Socio-Political Sciences”*, vol. 1, 64 (2021).

Saule Kaldybayeva considers the resettlement policy of tsarist Russia in Kazakhstan in the late XIX – early XX century<sup>3</sup>. The author shows that this policy had both positive and negative consequences for Kazakhstan. However, the article pays insufficient attention to the reaction of the Kazakh population to the resettlement policy. In the article, Alim Beisembayeva analyses the reasons for the weakening of the institution of khan's authority in Kazakhstan in the late 18th-early 19th century<sup>4</sup>. The author convincingly shows that the weakening of the khan's power was the result of the policy of the Russian Empire. However, the article does not give enough detail about the role of the Kazakh khans themselves in this process. Gulmira Sultangalieva et al. consider the social status and role of the Kazakh nobility in the Russian Empire<sup>5</sup>. The authors prove the privileged position of the Kazakh nobility. However, the article does not pay due attention to the influence of Russian colonization on the social structure of Kazakh society.

Thus, previous studies have not examined in sufficient detail the regional and local features of the colonization policy of the Russian Empire in Kazakhstan, the reaction of the Kazakh population to this policy, as well as the impact of colonization on the social structure of Kazakh society. This study aims to deepen the academic and public understanding of the era that significantly shaped modern Kazakhstan. The long-term effects of colonization are still felt today in issues such as changes in land use, ethnic tensions and infringement of sovereignty. By examining the complex dynamics between Russian imperialism and Kazakh reactions, this study provides historical context for contemporary society. It also brings deserved attention to Kazakh experiences and narratives that have often been overlooked. This revisionist account of the colonization of the Kazakh steppe will enrich the interpretation of the past and collective

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<sup>3</sup> KALDYBAYEVA, Saule, “The settlement of Russian peasants in Kazakhstan by the tsarist government in the late XIX-early XX century”, in *Bulletin “Historical and Socio-Political Sciences”*, vol. 1, 68 (2021). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51889/2021-1.1728-5461.07>

<sup>4</sup> BEISEMBAYEVA, Alim, “The reasons for the weakening of the institution of the Khan's power in the Kazakh Steppe in the context of the regional policy of the Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century”, in *Bulletin of Karaganda University*, vol. 101, 1 (2021), pp. 6-14.

<sup>5</sup> SULTANGALIEVA, Gulmira, TULESHOVA, Ulzhan, WERTH, Peter, “Nomadic Nobles: Pastoralism and privilege in the Russian Empire”, in *Slavic Review*, vol. 81, 1 (2022), pp. 77-96. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.78>

memory. Ultimately, it aims to demonstrate how revisiting this contentious history can help shape national identity and a shared vision for the future of Kazakhstan.

## 1. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The reviewed studies analyse the process of the Russian Empire's colonisation of the Kazakh steppe in the XVIII and XIX centuries. These studies provide different viewpoints on the reasons behind the colonisation, the important factors involved, and the outcomes that resulted from it.

Ulan Zhangalieyev et al. thoroughly examine the policies implemented by the Russian Empire in Kazakhstan and their profound influence on traditional Kazakh society<sup>6</sup>. They determine that these policies resulted in substantial transformations in the economy, political framework, social framework, and culture of the Kazakhs, with uncertain consequences – contributing to modernisation while also causing a decline in national identity. Paolo Sartori emphasises that the Russian government considered Kazakhstan to be under its control in the early XVIII century, even though they did not possess enough knowledge about the region<sup>7</sup>. The lack of knowledge and understanding influenced the colonial policy of Tsarist Russia, resulting in conflicts and misunderstandings, and causing Russia to overestimate its strength and influence.

Jeff Eden examines the 1803 assault on a Russian caravan, exposing it as a sophisticated, well-planned military manoeuvre rather than an impromptu act of desert piracy<sup>8</sup>. This event served as a pivotal moment in Russian policy, prompting the implementation of more ruthless measures to safeguard commercial interests. Charles Weller examines the utilisation

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<sup>6</sup> ZHANGALIEYEV, Ulan Kurmetkalievich, MUSABALINA, Gulnara, ABENOVA, Gulnur Atymtaevna, ADILBAEVA, Aigul Serikkanovna, KARIYEVA, Talzhan, “The policy of tsarism in Kazakhstan in the XVIII-XIX centuries: Consequences of its impact on traditional Kazakh society”, in *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, vol. 17, 6 (2020), pp. 601-609.

<sup>7</sup> SARTORI, Paolo, “A sound of silence in the archives: On eighteenth-century Russian diplomacy and the historical episteme of Central Asian hostility”, in *Itinerario*, vol. 44, 3 (2021), pp. 552-571. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000340>

<sup>8</sup> EDEN, Jeff, “Anatomy of a caravan raid: Peril and possibility in the Kazakh steppe, 1800-1860”, in *Journal of Central Asian History*, vol. 2, 1 (2023). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/27728668-20230011>

of the notion of “vestiges of the pre-Islamic era” in colonial ethnography, contending that it bolstered colonial ideology and provided a rationale for Russian hegemony<sup>9</sup>. Willard Sunderland examines the 1867 eradication of serfdom in Kazakhstan, highlighting its adverse effects such as heightened social disparity and the imposition of Russian culture<sup>10</sup>.

Chinpulat Kurbanov et al. provide a comprehensive account of Russia's strategic and economic objectives in Central Asia<sup>11</sup>. These objectives are primarily motivated by competition with the British Empire and a need to safeguard their southern borders while also gaining access to new trade routes. Russia pursued an imperial policy through military campaigns and the imposition of unequal treaties, which allowed it to gain control over important territories by the end of the 19th century.

Myrzantay Zhakyp analyses the process of colonisation, asserting that Russia sought to exert complete control over Kazakh society and economy<sup>12</sup>. The implementation of Russian policies resulted in significant environmental degradation, demographic changes, and cultural suppression, which had a profound impact on traditional Kazakh life. Although there are variations in the approaches taken, the authors concur that Russian colonisation had a profound impact on Kazakh society, although there is uncertainty regarding the exact nature and outcomes of this influence.

The studies collectively demonstrate the extensive and diverse influence of Russian colonisation on Kazakh society. Although the authors acknowledge that Russian colonisation brought about substantial changes, their evaluations of the characteristics and outcomes of this process

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<sup>9</sup> WELLER, Charles, “‘Pre-Islamic survivals’ among the Kazakhs in tsarist Russian and Kazakh colonial ethnography, 1770-1917”, in *‘Pre-Islamic Survivals’ in Muslim Central Asia*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 49-64.

<sup>10</sup> SUNDERLAND, Willard, “The imperial emancipations: Ending non-Russian serfdoms in nineteenth-century Russia”, in *Shifting Forms of Continental Colonialism*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 437-461.

<sup>11</sup> KURBANOV, Chinpulat Minasidinovich, SHANIYAZOV, Sharif Safarovich, NURFAYZIEV, Jaloliddin Bakhromovich, SHERBOBOEV, Mukhriddin Azimmurodugli, “Geopolitical and economic interests of the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century in Central Asia”, in *Palarch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, vol. 17, 7 (2020), pp. 8521-8546.

<sup>12</sup> ZHAKYP, Myrzantay, ASHENOVA, Altyнай, TOIBEKOVA, Saltanat, ZHUNISSOVA, Kamshat, KHUSSANOVA, Akbota, “Coverage in the periodical press of tsarist Russia of the colonial policy on the Kazakh land”, in *Scientific Herald of Uzhhorod University. Series Physics*, vol. 55 (2024), pp. 2516-2524.

frequently lack clarity. The implementation of Russian policies aimed at modernisation resulted in the erosion of national identity, exacerbated social inequality, and the stifling of cultural expression.

The analyses demonstrate the intricate nature of colonial interactions, emphasising the influence of lack of knowledge, deliberate opposition, and ideological justifications in shaping colonial policy and its results. The studies also highlight the geopolitical incentives driving Russian expansion and the enduring ramifications of colonial governance. To summarise, the literature review offers a thorough comprehension of the Russian Empire's colonisation of the Kazakh steppe, highlighting the importance of adopting a nuanced and multifaceted approach when studying colonial processes and their effects.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study uses a multifaceted approach to the study of primary and secondary source materials on the colonization of the Kazakh steppe by the Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a historical study, it relies primarily on qualitative analyses of archival documents, published materials, and scientific views. Where appropriate, quantitative data are used, in particular, demographic and economic statistics that shed light on the consequences of colonization. Sources and methods of analysis are chosen to foreground the views and experiences of the Kazakhs as a counterbalance to prevailing Russian-centred narratives.

Extensive archival materials are drawn from the holdings of the Russian State Historical Archive and the Omsk Regional Historical Archive. These previously classified government documents provide a glimpse into the motives, policies, and actions of the Russian imperial state throughout the colonization period. The documents analysed include official correspondence, reports, statistics, maps, and plans relating to the Kazakh steppe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reflecting Russian imperial interests, the archival sources contain candid information on colonization strategy, administration, military operations and attitudes towards the local population. In dealing with such diverse sources, the study employs several analytical techniques typical of historical research. Detailed analyses of the sources allow for a critical evaluation of the background, context, biases, and viewpoints reflected in the various texts and records. Cross-referencing and corroboration of details between

sources allows for more informed conclusions. Showing the chronology and location of events, politics, settlements, and changes of power illustrates wider patterns and relationships. Synthesizing different primary and secondary sources provides a more holistic account than relying on a single point of view.

Historical and genetic method. This method allows identifying the origins, preconditions, causes of historical events and processes, tracing their evolution and change of states. Within the framework of this study, the historical-genetic method was applied to analyse the preconditions and dynamics of colonization of Kazakh lands by the Russian Empire. Such issues as the origin of Russia's interest in the Kazakh territories, gradual advancement deep into the steppe, stages of establishing control and administrative-territorial structure were considered. Historical and comparative method. This method involves the comparison of two or more historical events, phenomena, processes in order to identify similarities and differences. In the study it was used to compare the colonial policy of Russia in Kazakhstan and other outskirts of the empire (for example, in Central Asia, the Caucasus). This made it possible to identify Russia's general imperial approaches and regional specifics. Historical-typological method. With the help of this method, historical phenomena are classified by the presence of typical, recurring features. In this paper, it was used in analysing typical features of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in Kazakhstan in comparison with other colonial powers.

Thus, the use of a set of traditional historical methods within the framework of a systematic approach allowed for a comprehensive study of the phenomenon of colonization of Kazakhstan by Russia, taking into account the preconditions, dynamics and comparative context. By integrating materials and methods that foreground the Kazakh experience, the study aims to construct a revised historical narrative. Instead of a standard narrative of progress and domination by the Russian Empire, it reveals the contested nature of colonization due to the competing interests of Russia and Kazakhstan. This revised narrative demonstrates Kazakh strategies of accommodation, resistance, identity preservation and cultural continuity in the face of profound political, economic and social change under Russian rule. This approach is consistent with recent methodological shifts in colonial studies that seek to incorporate subaltern voices and challenge hegemonic assumptions. Applied in this context, it allows for a clearer understanding of how colonization transformed and shaped Kazakh society over two centuries.



### 3. RESULTS

The colonization of the Kazakh steppe by the Russian Empire in the 18th-19th centuries was conditioned by a complex of strategic, geopolitical, economic and military-political factors. Russia's main imperial ambitions of that period were to expand its territory and strengthen its geopolitical position. The entry of the vast Kazakh steppes opened access to new regions of Central Asia, bordering the possessions of China and the sphere of influence of the British Empire in India. This allowed Russia to strengthen its position in the southern strategic direction, where colonial powers were competing. In addition, the annexation of sparsely populated Kazakh territories provided a resource of space to accommodate the excess population of the central provinces of the Russian Empire<sup>13</sup>. There was an active migration of peasants to the southern regions of the European part, the Volga region, the Urals, and Siberia. The inclusion of vast fertile steppes into the empire opened new prospects for resettlement policy. The vast expanses of the Kazakh steppe had long served as pastures for millions of herds of nomads<sup>14</sup>. Their agricultural potential, if properly organized, could be realized for the needs of the growing population of European Russia. The reorientation of the steppe to grain production was seen as the most important task. The richest mineral resources in the east of the Kazakh steppe – in the mountains of Altai and East Kazakhstan – were also of great interest to Russian industry. The development of the deposits could give an impetus to the development of the mining industry.

Finally, the advance to the south was dictated by considerations of strengthening the security of the southern borders of the empire. Nomadic raids from Western Kazakhstan posed a constant threat to the Urals, Western Siberia and the Urals. The subjugation of Kazakh tribes allowed moving the borderline far into the steppe and secures the rear areas. Thus, the combination of geopolitical, economic and military-strategic goals determined the persistence of the Russian Empire's expansion into the

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<sup>13</sup> Qazaqstan Tarihy, Revolt of 1837-1847 under the leadership of khan Kenesary. 01/06/2017. URL: <https://e-history.kz/en/history-of-kazakhstan/show/9571>. Accessed 30 May 2024.

<sup>14</sup> BARTH, Grzegorz, "Solidarity in the Context of Migration: A Philosophical Perspective", in *Historia i Swiat*, vol. 12 (2023), pp. 481-494. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2023.12.31>

Kazakh lands. This corresponded to the general logic of territorial and resource expansion, characteristic of all colonial powers of that period. It is worth noting that official rhetoric portrayed the annexation of Kazakh lands as a voluntary process carried out ostensibly in the interests of the Kazakhs themselves. The signing of acts of Russian citizenship by a number of khans was used as a formal basis. In reality, these acts were the result of pressure or lack of understanding of the real consequences. Russia's military and administrative advancement deep into the Kazakh steppe was carried out gradually, from the 18th century, through the creation of fortified lines. The key strongholds were Omsk, Semipalatinsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Gorny Shield and others. These outposts were covered by powerful garrisons of regular troops and Cossacks<sup>15</sup>.

In parallel, settlements of Russian peasants, Cossacks, retired soldiers were formed around them. The Kazakhs were forced out of their pastures, their nomads were moving further away from the border. This process accelerated in the XIX century with the deployment of mass resettlement in the steppe<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the military colonization of Kazakh lands was dictated by a powerful complex of expansionist aspirations of the Russian Empire. The combination of geopolitical, economic and strategic motives predetermined the rigid and consistent nature of this colonial policy during the XVIII-XIX centuries<sup>17</sup>. The beginning of purposeful colonization of Kazakh lands by the Russian Empire dates back to the first quarter of the 18th century. Before that, the Russian presence in the region was limited and sporadic, threatening only the border Kazakh peoples. Systematic measures to seize and consolidate control over the steppe were taken by Peter the Great, who sought to use the resources of the Kazakh lands to realize his military and economic ambitions. The first step was the conclusion in 1731 with Abulkhair, the khan of the Younger Zhuz, of a treaty on accepting Russian citizenship<sup>18</sup>. This unequal treaty actually meant the establishment of the Russian protectorate over part of the

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<sup>15</sup> MORRISON, Alexander, *The Russian conquest of Central Asia: A study in imperial expansion, 1814-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> KURBANOV et al., "Geopolitical and economic art. cit."

<sup>17</sup> KARAMYSHEV, Dmytro, "Global development index as indicator of global governance: Integrated assessment of OECD member countries development", in *Public Policy and Administration*, vol. 18, 4 (2019), pp. 377-394. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13165/VPA-19-18-4-01>

<sup>18</sup> EDEN, "Anatomy of a caravan... art. cit."

Kazakh territories. It was used as a legal basis for the construction of military fortifications deep into the steppe.

The first strongholds of the Russian Empire on the territory of the Younger Kazakh Zhuz appeared in the 30-40s of the XVIII century. These were the fortresses Omsk and Yamyshevo, founded on the strategically important Irtysh River. Their construction marked the beginning of Russia's systematic military advance and consolidation in the central regions of the Kazakh steppe. The Omsk fortress was founded in 1716 by decree of Peter the Great on an elevated promontory at the confluence of the Omi River into the Irtysh. The place was chosen well – here the Siberian Road had been passing since ancient times, and also there was a pass over the Irtysh. Around Omsk, vast meadows and steppes gave space for garrison and settlers. Initially, the fortress was a small stockade of wooden walls and towers. However, already in the 1720s it was expanded and strengthened, turning into a powerful military stronghold with stone walls up to 2 metres thick. The garrison numbered about 2 thousand regular soldiers and Cossacks with artillery. The Yamyshevskaya fortress was founded in 1715 on the high right bank of the Irtysh River, about 150 kilometres below Omsk. It was also a wooden and earthen fortification with a small garrison. The name came from the surname of its founder, Matvey Yamyshev. The construction of these two fortresses marked the beginning of Russia's purposeful expansion into the lands of the Younger zhuz, inhabited mainly by clans of the Middle zhuz. The formal reason was the treaty of 1731 on the acceptance of Russian citizenship by Abulkhair Khan, who ruled in the western part of the zhuz<sup>19</sup>.

However, the real goal was to establish strategic control over the key waterway of the Kazakh steppe Irtysh River. The fortresses allowed controlling the western and eastern flanks of the Younger zhuz, carrying a threat to the nomads of the Middle tribe. This caused resistance from the Kazakhs, who repeatedly attempted to take Omsk and Yamyshevo by storm. In parallel, construction of settlements for Russian settlers started around the fortresses. By 1750 there were over 30 villages in the vicinity of Omsk, and the population reached 10 thousand people. The rapid influx of settlers led to rapid Russianisation of the adjacent territories. Further to the east, in 1718, the fortress Semipalatinsk was founded, then Ust-Kamenogorsk in 1720. By the middle of the XVIII century, a relatively continuous line of fortifications along Irtysh with the length of about 1000

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<sup>19</sup> MORRISON, *The Russian conquest... op. cit.*

km up to the lake Zaisan was formed. This line fixed the southern border of the territory controlled by Russia.

At the same time, the advance deep into the Kazakh steppes from the south, from the direction of Western Siberia under Russian control, intensified. Here in 1720, the fortress of Biysk was founded, and in 1724 – Ust-Kamenogorsk fortress. By the middle of the century, the southern border of colonization reached Lake Balkhash. Thus, the Kazakhs of the Younger Zhuz were squeezed between two lines of fortifications. Massive construction of fortresses, outposts, and pickets began on the captured lands. Only along the Irtysh, by the end of the XVIII century, there were more than 30 fortified points. The number of Russian troops in the region reached 35 thousand soldiers and officers. This allowed strict control over the local Kazakh population, suppressing any attempts of resistance. The stronghold forts became centres of colonization expansion. Near them, settlements of peasants, Cossacks and retired soldiers were formed. By the end of the XVIII century, there were up to 40 villages with 10 thousand settlers in the Omsk area alone. The massive influx of colonists led to the displacement of the indigenous Kazakh population from the most fertile pastures to the arid steppes. Thus, already at the first stage of colonization, the Russian Empire managed to capture vast territories of the Younger Zhuz in a short time and to start their intensive economic development in the interests of the metropolis. The steppe became the object of military and administrative subordination and settlement by the Russian population. This was the beginning of the displacement of nomadic Kazakhs from their ancestral lands and the transformation of the traditional way of life.

In the first half of the XIX century, the Russian Empire moved to systematic colonization of Kazakh territories. A rigid administrative-territorial system of governance with reliance on regular troops and bureaucratic apparatus was introduced<sup>20</sup>. This allowed establishing total control over the steppe and intensifying the displacement of the indigenous population. The steppe regions of the Younger and partly Middle Zhuz were divided into 5 administrative units headed by Russian officials. Traditional governing bodies of the Kazakhs in the form of congresses of khans and sultans were abolished. The power of khans was actually reduced to the execution of orders of the imperial authorities<sup>21</sup>. Russian

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<sup>20</sup> SARTORI, “A sound of silence... art. cit.”.

<sup>21</sup> BEISEMBAYEVA, “The reasons... art. cit.”.

laws, legal proceedings and tax system were actively introduced in the territories under control. General conscription for Kazakhs was introduced. This caused mass discontent, which periodically erupted in uprisings. The largest was the uprising led by Kenesary Kasymov in 1837-1847, which covered a significant part of the Younger and Middle zhuzes. However, the empire threw large forces, including artillery and cavalry, against the rebels. By brutal punitive measures, the rebellion was suppressed, and Kenesara was killed<sup>22</sup>. In parallel with the suppression of resistance, colonization increased its pace. Its main tool was the mass settlement of the steppe by Russian peasants-settlers. This movement gained the greatest scope in the 50-90s of the XIX century. Only in the Semirechenskaya oblast in 1854-1891 more than 50 thousand peasant families, or about 300 thousand people, moved. The flow of settlers filled the fertile river valleys, displacing Kazakh nomads in places not suitable for cattle breeding<sup>23</sup>.

The resettlement movement radically changed the ethno-demographic balance. If at the beginning of the XIX century Kazakhs made up 90% of the population, by 1917 – less than 35%. At the same time, the bulk of settlers were concentrated in the north, along the border with Russia. The southern districts retained a predominantly Kazakh population. With the settlement of colonists, the traditional nomadic way of life of Kazakhs was broken. Pastures were ploughed up, and the forage base was drastically reduced. The colonial administration forbade nomads from travelling within 15-30 kilometres of the settlements to avoid conflicts. Many Kazakhs were forced to migrate to the inferior steppes of the south and lead a semi-sedentary lifestyle<sup>24</sup>. Thus, in the XIX century, the empire broke the resistance of the Kazakhs by harsh measures and through mass colonization radically changed the shape of their ancestral lands in the interests of Russia. This led to tragic consequences for the indigenous ethos and traditional way of life. Russian colonization led to serious upheavals and disorganization of Kazakh society. The nomadic economy was destroyed, traditional migration routes were lost, and access to

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<sup>22</sup> Qazaqstan Tarihy, Revolt of 1837-1847 under the leadership of khan Kenesary. 01/06/2017. URL: <https://e-history.kz/en/history-of-kazakhstan/show/9571>. Accessed 30 May 2024.

<sup>23</sup> KALDYBAYEVA, “The settlement... art. cit.”

<sup>24</sup> KALDYBAYEVA, “The settlement... art. cit.”; ZHANGALIEYEV et al., “The policy of tsarism... art. cit.”; MORRISON, *The Russian conquest... op. cit.*

pastures was significantly reduced<sup>25</sup>. From a self-sufficient pastoral system, the Kazakhs turned into a beggarly and dependent people. Having reduced their livestock, many were forced to work as migrant labourers or as labourers for Russian migrants.

Cultural repression and economic marginalization created a sense of hopelessness and humiliation. However, colonization helped to strengthen ethnic solidarity<sup>26</sup>. Tribal affiliation was replaced by a broader Kazakh national identity against foreign domination. The loss of political sovereignty caused a desire to restore and preserve cultural and linguistic traditions<sup>27</sup>. The social structure struggled to cope with the sweeping changes and divisions of the colonial era. A small educated class emerged in the cities and in the Russian administration. However, rural nomadic communities became increasingly poor and isolated. The colony also led to religious displacement, with Islamic institutions displaced or suppressed and Orthodox Christianity spreading among the settlers. This complex legacy would shape Kazakh society over the turbulent decades that followed. The annexation of the Kazakh steppe ultimately proved decisive for the trajectory of the region's development<sup>28</sup>. Imperial dictates redrew political boundaries for decades to come. The landscape itself was permanently altered by colonization. Subsequently, Soviet policy continued to exploit the region for agricultural and industrial purposes<sup>29</sup>. Kazakh autonomy was jeopardized, and major political decisions were dictated from Moscow.

Today, the cultural, economic and psychological consequences persist. Generations have inherited the collective trauma of exclusion and

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<sup>25</sup> YEBOAH, Ata Senior, CAROL, Sarah, FATHI, Atefeh, "Demographic Challenges for the Caucasian Race: What Can the Assimilation of Cultures on the European Continent Lead to?", in *European Chronicle*, vol. 7, 4 (2022), pp. 5-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59430/euch/4.2022.05>

<sup>26</sup> VOLKOV, Vladislav, "Self-Categorization of Youth in Discursive Practices of the Russian Speaking Milieu of Lativa", in *Etnograficeskoe Obozrenie*, vol. 2022, 5 (2022), pp. 131-147.

<sup>27</sup> ZHANGALIEYEV, et al., "The policy of tsarism... art. cit."

<sup>28</sup> MUSSATAYEVA, Farida, MALGARAYEVA, Zaure, ISSAYEVA, Meruyert, "«Places of memory» as the historical and spiritual values of the Kazakh culture regeneration", in *Trans/Form/Acao*, vol. 47, 2 (2024), article number e02400173. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n2.e02400173>

<sup>29</sup> KONIECZNY, Marcin, "Problems of researching the history of exile of Ukrainians and of the Baltic peoples in the USSR", in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 33, 5 (2023), pp. 27-36. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.46493/2663-2675.33\(5\).2023.27-36](https://doi.org/10.46493/2663-2675.33(5).2023.27-36)

marginalization. Traditional livelihoods and relationships with the land have been severed. Ethnic tensions persist between Kazakhs and Slavic settlers, who remain a significant minority. Since independence in 1991, Kazakh leaders have struggled to find a balance between different national perceptions and to forge a unified identity<sup>30</sup>. At the same time, the Kazakh people showed truly amazing resilience and will to survive. Despite the policy of Russification, the Kazakhs managed to preserve their native language and cultural identity<sup>31</sup>. The active revival of national traditions after independence testifies to their viability. Today, Kazakhstan has regained sovereignty on its ancestral territory. This opens up prospects for the restoration of the economy, the development of culture and the consolidation of society based on genuine national interests. Thus, despite its difficult colonial past, Kazakhstan has every opportunity to build a prosperous and fair future for all citizens. Based on historical experience, Kazakh society is able to overcome the legacy of the imperial period and move forward in the spirit of harmony and unity.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The article by David Schimmelpenninck analyses the role of the Russian Geographical Society (RGS) in the implementation of the Russian Empire's colonial policy in Central Asia in the XIX century<sup>32</sup>. The author considers the activities of the RGS as one of the tools for spreading Russian influence in the region. The researcher shows the dual nature of the RGS, which combined scientific and practical functions. On the one hand, the RGS organized large-scale expeditions to study the geography, ethnography, and history of the peoples of the region. These expeditions provided extensive scientific material, which was published in the works of the RGS. But at the same time, the collected data were actively used by

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<sup>30</sup> DINAJ, Shefqet. "The crimes of Serbian Forces in the Municipality of Gjakova (1998-1999)", in *Social and Legal Studios*, vol. 7, 1 (2024), pp. 18-26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32518/sals1.2024.18>

<sup>31</sup> STOROZHUK, Svitlana, "Memorial communities in the global world", in *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology*, vol. 28, 1 (2022), pp. 1-13. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.33120/ssppj.vi49\(52\).262](https://doi.org/10.33120/ssppj.vi49(52).262)

<sup>32</sup> SCHIMMELPENNINCK, David, "Handmaidens of continental colonialism? The ambiguities of the imperial Russian geographical society's central Asian expeditions", in *Shifting Forms of Continental Colonialism*, Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 151-173.

the Russian administration to strengthen colonial rule in the region. The author examines in detail the RGS expeditions to Kazakhstan, noting that they provided valuable knowledge about the region, but this knowledge was used for more effective control over the local population and the Russification policy. Thus, in the opinion of the researcher, the RGS objectively contributed to the realization of the Russian Empire's colonial aspirations in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. At the same time, it combined scientific research with the collection of practically useful information for the administration.

The analysis of the role of the RGS presented in the article is very interesting and useful for understanding the mechanisms of implementation of Russian colonial policy in the periphery of the empire. However, it does not give a full and comprehensive view of the phenomenon of colonization of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The study examines the colonization of Kazakhstan comprehensively, taking into account a wide range of factors – geopolitical, economic, military, religious and cultural. The activities of the RGS were only one component of this multifactorial process, along with economic development of the territory, migration policy, military pressure<sup>33</sup>. Thus, despite the interesting analysis of the role of the RGS, the article by David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye highlights only one aspect of the complex and multifaceted process of colonization of Kazakhstan by the Russian Empire<sup>34</sup>. A holistic understanding of this process requires a comprehensive approach, taking into account the variety of internal and external factors that determined Russia's imperial expansion in the Central Asian region. It is this approach that has been realized in this study.

The book by Toru Akiyama makes an important contribution to understanding the role of local elites in the process of colonization of Kazakhstan by the Russian Empire<sup>35</sup>. The strength of the work is the detailed coverage of the biography of Shabdan Zhantai uulu – a representative of the Kazakh nobility, who had to manoeuvre between the interests of the indigenous population and the demands of the colonizers. The author managed to demonstrate the difficult situation of local elites

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<sup>33</sup> VOLKOV, Vladislav, "Ethnic minorities of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in academic research", in *Etnograficeskoe Obozrenie*, vol. 2017, 2 (2017), pp. 5-8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> AKIYAMA, Toru, *The Qırghız Baatır and the Russian Empire: A portrait of a local intermediary in Russian Central Asia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021.



under the conditions of colonial expansion by means of a concrete example. However, one cannot but agree that the researcher pays insufficient attention to other aspects of Russia's colonial policy in the region – migration, Russification, and economic development. For a holistic picture, it is necessary to take into account the whole complex of political, social, economic and cultural factors of the colonization of Kazakhstan. In general, the book by the researcher is of undoubted value, supplementing knowledge about a separate aspect of the complex multifaceted process of colonization of Kazakhstan by the Russian Empire. At the same time, a full understanding of this phenomenon requires consideration of its other facets, which was done in this study.

Iner Neumann and Wiger Einar consider the Kazakh steppe as an example of the influence of steppe nomadic traditions on the development of statehood and international relations in Eurasia<sup>36</sup>. This is important for understanding the peculiarities of Kazakhstan's geopolitical position. The authors analyse in detail the steppe traditions of the Kazakhs, such as mobility, militancy, and cattle-breeding culture. They show that these traditions served as the basis of Kazakh resistance to Russian colonial expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries. Particularly valuable is the geopolitical approach of the researchers, which allows considering Kazakhstan as an important factor in the struggle between the Russian and British empires in Central Asia. However, insufficient attention is paid to the economic reasons for Russia's advancement into the Kazakh steppe. The study also emphasizes the importance of Kazakh steppe traditions in their resistance to Russian conquest. It is noted that the mobile cattle-breeding way of life and militancy of the Kazakhs served as a basis for their struggle against the colonizers. However, this work considers not only the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and Kazakhstan. The complex of economic, social, cultural and religious factors of Kazakhs' resistance to colonial conquest is analysed. The role of Islam in the consolidation of Kazakh society in the face of external threat is shown. Thus, the work of the researchers contributes to the coverage of the geopolitical context of the colonization of Kazakhstan. And this study complements it by analysing other important factors of Kazakh resistance, which allows creating a more complete picture of this historical

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<sup>36</sup> NEUMANN, Iner, EINAR, Wiger, *The steppe tradition in international relations: Russians, Turks and European State Building 4000 BCE-2018 CE*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

phenomenon. It also contributes to understanding the role of geopolitical, cultural and historical factors in the confrontation between Kazakhstan and the Russian Empire. It helps to explain the Kazakhs' stubborn resistance to colonial conquest.

Adeeb Khalid offers a new comprehensive approach to the history of Central Asia, taking into account not only external but also internal factors of the region's development<sup>37</sup>. This allows a better understanding of the causes and peculiarities of the Russian colonization of Kazakhstan. The author analyses in detail the process of conquest of Central Asia by the Russian Empire, paying special attention to the resistance of local peoples, including Kazakhs. The researcher shows that the colonial expansion of Russia encountered stubborn opposition of the indigenous population of the region. Particularly valuable is the researcher's use of a wide range of diverse sources is particularly valuable, which gives his work objectivity and scientific reliability. The lack of coverage of the consequences of colonization for the development of Central Asia within the Russian Empire is noteworthy. However, this study considers in more detail the long-term consequences of colonization for Kazakhstan. It is shown that the colonial past influences the modern development of the country in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres. In general, the researcher's work makes an important contribution to the study of the history of Kazakhstan's accession to Russia, demonstrating the complex and contradictory nature of this process.

Rico Isaacs and Erica Marat consider the uprising of Khan Kenesary Kasymov in Kazakhstan in 1837-1847<sup>38</sup>. This allows a deeper study of the forms and methods of resistance of Kazakhs to Russian colonial expansion. The authors analyse in detail the preconditions, course, and results of this largest anti-colonial performance in the history of Kazakhstan in the 19th century. They show the scale and organization of the Kazakhs' struggle under the leadership of Kenesary Kasymov. Particularly valuable is the involvement of a variety of sources, including archival documents and folklore. It gives objectivity and reliability to the work. But there is an excessive emphasis only on the confrontation with Russia, without taking into account the internal causes of the uprising.

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<sup>37</sup> KHALID, Adeeb, *Central Asia: A new history from the imperial conquests to the present*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> ISAACS, Rico, MARAT, Erica, *Routledge handbook of contemporary Central Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2022.

However, this work analyses other forms of resistance alongside the armed struggle – the Kazakhs' preservation of their culture, traditions, and language. It is shown that despite colonial pressure, the Kazakhs managed to preserve their cultural identity. Overall, the study is important for understanding the scope and intensity of Kazakh resistance to the colonial conquests of the Russian Empire. It introduces new data on this rebellion as an important episode in the history of Kazakhstan.

Jin Noda gives an overview of the political history of Kazakhstan in the 16th-19th centuries, paying special attention to the resistance of Kazakhs to Russian colonial expansion<sup>39</sup>. This allows tracing the evolution of Kazakh statehood in the period under consideration. The author covers in detail the process of the loss of independence of the Kazakh Khanate, showing the various forms of resistance of the Kazakhs to the advance of the Russian Empire. Reliance on a wide range of historical sources gives the work objectivity. At the same time, it is possible to note insufficiently deep analyses of socio-economic and ethnocultural processes in Kazakh society during this period. This does not allow fully explaining the reasons for colonial conquests. This study also devotes considerable attention to analysing the resistance of the Kazakh people to the Russian colonial regime. Both the armed struggle of khans and sultans and the partisan resistance of ordinary Kazakhs are considered. However, this work analyses more deeply the socio-economic prerequisites of resistance. It is shown that in addition to political motives, the struggle of the Kazakhs was caused by the seizure of land, destruction of traditional economy and way of life. In addition, this study pays more attention not only to the armed struggle, but also to other forms of resistance – preservation of cultural traditions, language, religion. Nevertheless, the work of the researcher is valuable as a generalizing study of the political history of Kazakhstan during the loss of state independence.

Jennifer Keating analyses the influence of the environment and natural and climatic conditions on the process of conquest and incorporation of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, by the Russian Empire<sup>40</sup>. This allows a deeper understanding of the difficulties and peculiarities of the colonization of the region. The author shows how climate, landscape,

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<sup>39</sup> NODA, Jin, "The Kazakhs, 16th-19th centuries", in *Asian History*, 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.317>

<sup>40</sup> KEATING, Jennifer, *On arid ground: Political ecologies of empire in Russian Central Asia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022.

water scarcity and other environmental factors influenced the course of military operations and the administrative structure of the region. A new and original approach to the study of these issues is proposed. At the same time, insufficient attention to the political and economic aspects of Russia's expansion in the region can be noted. However, this study comprehensively analyses the whole range of colonization factors, not limiting itself only to the environmental aspect. This does not allow assessing the complex of causes and factors of colonization. Nevertheless, the work of J. Keating is valuable in that it introduces new data on the role of natural and climatic conditions in the development of vast territories of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, by the Russian Empire.

Olzhas Kuanbay, on the basis of archival documents, analyses the features of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire in the West Siberian Governor-General's Office in relation to the Kazakh population in the 19th century<sup>41</sup>. This allows a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and consequences of the colonization of Kazakh lands. The author examines in detail such aspects as the resettlement of Russian peasants, the introduction of Russian legislation and administration, and the infringement of traditional Kazakh institutions. Of great value is the involvement of new archival data. At the same time, there is a one-sided interpretation of the events, with an emphasis on the negative consequences for the Kazakh people. The reaction and position of the Russian administration is not sufficiently covered. This study also devotes considerable attention to the analysis of Russia's colonial policy in Kazakhstan – administrative transformations, resettlement policy, infringement of the rights of Kazakhs. However, a more balanced approach is realized in this work. Along with the negative aspects of colonization, some positive phenomena are also noted – the development of education, medicine, improvement of living standards of part of the Kazakh population. The views of the Russian administration are also analysed. In addition, this study more deeply analyses the long-term consequences of colonization for the development of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the study by the researcher is important because it introduces

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<sup>41</sup> KUANBAY, Olzhas, “The colonial policy of the Russian Empire in relation to the Kazakhs of the West Siberian governorship in archival documents (II half of XIX c.)”, in *Otan Tarikhi*, vol. 3, 95 (2021), pp. 67-80. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.51943/1814-6961\\_2021\\_3\\_67](http://dx.doi.org/10.51943/1814-6961_2021_3_67)

new archival materials on the history of the annexation of Western Kazakhstan to the Russian Empire.

The reviewed studies make an important contribution to the study of religious, social, political, economic and geopolitical aspects of interaction between the Russian Empire and Kazakh society. A common strength of the works is the use of an extensive source base, including archival documents, periodicals, ethnographic and folklore sources. This ensures the scientific reliability of the conclusions. At the same time, one can note the predominantly one-sided approach of the authors, who emphasize either the Kazakhs' resistance to colonization or Russia's imperial policy. A comprehensive systemic analysis of the process of interaction and mutual influence of Russia and Kazakhstan is insufficiently presented. Nevertheless, in general, the historiography of the topic has a solid source base and makes a significant contribution to the study of complex and contradictory processes of annexation of Kazakh lands to the Russian Empire.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the process of colonization of the Kazakh steppe by the Russian Empire in the XVIII-XIX centuries, and formulates the following key conclusions. The first thing that should be emphasized is the complexity of factors that determined the colonization of Kazakhstan. The research confirms that in addition to Russia's geopolitical, economic and military-strategic interests, cultural, religious and ethnic aspects played a significant role in shaping this process. The second important conclusion is the two-stage nature of colonization. At the first stage, starting from the 30s of the 18th century, Russia resorted to the creation of fortified lines and the gradual establishment of its presence in the Kazakh steppes. These fortified lines served not only to ensure security and control, but also to establish contacts with the local population. During this period, Russia actively interacted with the Kazakh khanates and tribes, explored the territory and assessed the potential for future colonization. However, in the 19th century, a more active stage of colonization began. At this time, Russia introduced administrative-territorial management in the occupied territories and began mass colonization by Russian settlers. This phased approach was an important stage in colonization, as it brought about a change in the social and economic structure of the region. Russian settlers introduced new

cultural and economic elements into the Kazakh steppe, which significantly affected the local population.

Understanding this two-stage dynamic of colonization allows analysing the process and its consequences in more depth, and assessing the influence of the Russian Empire on the development of Kazakhstan during the period of colonial expansion. The third conclusion concerns the socio-cultural changes that occurred as a result of colonization. The destruction of the traditional nomadic economic system, changes in social structures and the weakening of the national elite in Kazakh society were observed. These changes have formed a special socio-cultural heritage that continues to influence modern Kazakhstan. The fourth conclusion is related to the active resistance and preservation of the cultural identity of the Kazakh people. Despite colonial pressures, Kazakhs were able to preserve their cultural uniqueness and actively resist colonial takeovers. This demonstrates the strength and resilience of the Kazakh nation.

In conclusion, the colonization of Kazakhstan had a profound and multifaceted impact on the region and its society. Its historical legacy remains relevant and influences contemporary life in Kazakhstan. Further research could focus on a more in-depth study of the regional specificities of colonization and the role of Kazakhstan in the context of Russian imperial expansion.

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