ABSTRACT

of the dissertation by Zhanna Dyusembek for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the specialty "8D02206 – History"
on the topic: "The Institution of Distance and Local Chiefs in the Kazakh Steppe 1831–1869"

Description of the Research. The dissertation examines the formation and functioning of the institution of distant (*distanochnye*) and local chiefs in the territory inhabited by the Kazakhs of the Orenburg Department between 1831-1868.

Relevance of the Research. Contemporary trends in the study of imperial center–periphery relations emphasize a shift toward microhistorical approaches that foreground the agency of local elites within imperial structures. The study of individual regions within a microhistorical framework provides insight into the details of the historical process: the mechanisms of appointing chiefs, their everyday practices, conflicts, and interactions.

In this context, the study of the institutionalization of local administration in the Kazakh Steppe during the first half of the nineteenth century is highly relevant. First, this institution constituted the lowest administrative tier of the Russian Empire in the Kazakh Steppe of the nineteenth century, facilitating interaction between the imperial center and the Kazakh nomadic population. Second, an understanding of the logic underlying this system of governance will provide a foundation for interpreting the processes of administrative policy formation at the present stage.

The key factors determining the problematic status of the study of distant and local chiefs include:

- The fragmentary nature of historical research and the insufficient scholarly attention devoted to the establishment of *distantsii* (districts) and localities, the reasons for their creation, and the dynamics of their introduction into the Kazakh Steppe, including the logic of their localization and administrative-territorial configuration;
-The absence of comprehensive analytical models of the relations between representatives of the Kazakh elite and the regional administration under conditions of imperial integration;
-The lack of critical reinterpretation of imperial realities in the Steppe, which underscores the need for a comprehensive, systematic, and objective study and a thorough analysis of imperial policy in the Kazakh Steppe in order to introduce new perspectives on the mechanisms through which the institution of distant administration was implemented.

State of Scholarship. The degree to which the topic has been studied is assessed through an analysis of pre-revolutionary, Soviet, and contemporary Kazakhstani and foreign scholarship (see Section 1.2 of the dissertation).

Pre-revolutionary historiography is represented by the works of G.F. Gens, A.I. Levshin, I.I. Kraft, I.M. Kazantsev, A.I. Dobrosmyslov, L. Meyer, A.V. Vasilyev, A.E. Alektorov, N.I. Ilminsky, I.F. Blaramberg. Their works contain valuable information on the imperial administrative policy and the system of distant administration, although they are largely narrative in character.

During the Soviet period, studies were published on the administrative policy of the empire, the colonial system, and issues of education, including works by E.B. Bekmakhanov, S.Z. Zimanov, A.F. Ryazanov and T.T. Tazhibayev.

In the post-Soviet period, a new stage began in the interpretation of imperial policy and administrative governance in the Kazakh Steppe. This is evidenced by studies of the policy of the Russian Empire, in particular the research of B.M. Abdrakhmanova, G.B. Izbassarova, D.V. Vasilyev, I.V. Poberezhnikov, R. Pochekaev, G.S. Sultanangaliyeva, T.T. Dalaeva, S.K. Uderbayeva and M. Abdrakhim.

Purpose and Objectives of the research. The purpose of the research is to systematically reconstruct the functional role and activities of distant and local chiefs in implementing the imperial administrative policy in the territory of the Kazakhs of the Orenburg Department, and to model the intra-system and multi-level interactions of distant and local chiefs with the regional administration.

The research objectives are oriented toward the consistent resolution of the following tasks:

-To develop a conceptual framework for the study;

-To conduct a critical analysis of the historical literature on the problem;

-To establish the quantitative parameters and geo-administrative localization of *distantsii* and localities in the territory of the Kazakhs of the Orenburg Department;

-To reconstruct the territorial configuration of the settlement of Kazakh clans within the *distantsii*;

-To identify the strategic and tactical methods used to involve representatives of the Kazakh nomadic elite in the administrative service of the empire;

-To identify the personal data of distant and local chiefs (social origin, education, place of service);

-To analyze the Kazakh perception of the activities of distant and local chiefs;

-To determine the motives for cooperation between the Kazakh nomadic elite and the Orenburg administration.

Research methodology. The methodology of the research is grounded in new imperial history, local history, and a microhistorical perspective. This approach makes it possible to consider the institution of distant and local chiefs not merely as an administrative construct, but as a system of locally oriented practices of governance, mediation, and collaboration between imperial authority and the Kazakh nomadic elite. The study employs prosopographical analysis, typological classification, and systems analysis.

Sources base of the research. The source base of the study rests on a broad range of written sources, divided into the following groups:

Legislative acts. Of particular importance are legislative documents of the Russian Empire from the first half of the nineteenth century, including the "Approved Opinion of the Committee on Asian Affairs Concerning the Transformation of the Administration of the Orenburg Region" (the Charter on the Orenburg Kazakhs) of 1824; the Regulation on the Administration of the Orenburg Kazakhs of 14 June 1844; the Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire (PSZRI, Vol. 19, No. 17998); and the Regulation on the School for Kazakh Children at the Border Commission (PSZRI, Vol. 19, No. 17999).

Archival documents. The second group comprises documentary and administrative records of the Orenburg Border Commission preserved in the fonds of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Almaty, Kazakhstan), the United State Archive of Orenburg Region (Orenburg, Russia), the Russian State Military-Historical Archive (Moscow, Russia), the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (Moscow, Russia), and the Central State Historical Archive of Georgia (Tbilisi, Georgia).

Official reference and statistical materials, including address-calendars, reference books, and commemorative books.

Materials from the periodical press, particularly publications of *Turgaiskaya gazeta* for 1898.

Materials of oral folk creativity. The colonial policy of the Russian Empire, which intensified in the first half of the nineteenth century in its efforts to develop the Steppe space, became a central theme in the works of akyns and zhyrau of the "Zar Zaman" era .

Published document collections. These include *Materials on the History of the Political System of Kazakhstan*(1960) [33, pp. 214–215] and the collection of documents and materials *Kazakh-Russian Relations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1964) [34, p. 256].

In the post-Soviet period, the following collections were published: *The National Liberation Struggle of the Kazakh People under the Leadership of Kenesary Kasymov* (1996) ; *The National Liberation Movement of the Kazakh People from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (2019) ; *Materials on the Introduction of the Russian Political System of Administration in Kazakhstan* (1999) ; *The History of Kazakhstan in Documents and Materials*(Issue 1); "On the Most Honored and Influential Horde Members," included in the series *The History of Kazakhstan in Russian Sources of the Sixteenth–Twentieth Centuries* ; and the collection of documents and materials *Kazakh Officials in the Service of the Russian Empire* .

Object and Subject of the research. The object of the research is the system of colonial administrative governance of the Russian Empire in the territory of the Kazakhs of the Orenburg Department during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The subject of the research is the specific features of the functioning of the institution of distant and local chiefs, their social composition, powers, and areas of activity, as well as their role in the transformation of the traditional system of authority in the Kazakh Steppe between 1831 and 1868.

Chronological and territorial frameworks. The chronological framework of the dissertation is determined by the period of the introduction of new administrative structures in the territory of the Kazakhs of the Orenburg Department in the 1830s and concludes in the late 1860s, when the system of *distantsii* was abolished and the volost system was introduced at the lowest level of administration.

The territorial framework of the dissertation is defined by the territory of nomadic migration of the Junior Zhuz, which was divided as a result of administrative reforms into three parts: Western, Middle, and Eastern.

Scientific novelty of the dissertation. The scientific novelty of the work consists of the following:

The geographical localization of the *distantsii* and localities functioning in the territory of the Kazakhs of the Orenburg Department has been identified;

The participation of Kazakhs in the creation of new *distantsii* (Nos. 32–41) has been examined;

A typology of *distantsii* has been developed, identifying their categories - frontier-line (*prilinear*), steppe, and "special" *distantsii* - and determining their quantitative distribution according to territorial principle;

A periodization of the functioning of *distantsii* has been proposed: frontier-line (1831–1840), steppe (1841–1850), and "special" (1848–1850 and 1862–1867) *distantsii*;

The territorial boundaries of clan settlement and the routes of their seasonal migrations within *distantsii* and localities have been systematically reconstructed;

The shifting intra-steppe boundaries between the Kazakhs of the Orenburg and West Siberian departments have been examined;

For the first time, a corpus of biographical data on 144 distant chiefs and 298 local elders has been systematized, and dynasties of Kazakh officials (the Bikbulatovs, Syugalins, and Babasovs) have been identified;

For the first time, the mechanism for appointing distant and local chiefs has been determined, including the procedures for their approval and the practice of their distribution across *distantsii* and localities;

A new vertical of power within nomadic society has been identified: sultan-ruler - distant chief - local chief;

The functional duties of distant and local chiefs have been defined in the context of their interaction with the regional administration and sultans-rulers.

Scientific statements submitted for defense

1. The theoretical framework for studying the institution of distant and local chiefs demonstrates that this institution constituted the lowest tier of

administrative governance, combining elements of traditional nomadic authority with imperial practices of administration. The research is based on the theory of collaborationism (R. Robinson), frontier theory (F. Turner, A. Kappeler, T. Tebaev, I.V. Poberezhnikov, R. Pochekaev), and the regional approach (A. Kappeler, K. Matsuzato, A. Remnev).

2. The system of distant administration, established in 1831, constituted a multi-level administrative and territorial structure. Based on an analysis of the chronology of the creation of *distantsii*, a periodization of their functioning is proposed: frontier-line *distantsii* (1831–1840), steppe *distantsii* (1841–1850), and "special" *distantsii* (1848–1850 and 1862–1867).

3. The process of appointing representatives of the Kazakh nomadic elite to the positions of chiefs of *distantsii* and localities has been identified, and the interests of both the regional authorities and the local population in nominating particular candidates have been determined.

4. The functional duties of distant and local chiefs - such as collecting the kibitka tax, maintaining internal stability within a *distantsiya*, and gathering information on the movements of Kazakh clans - demonstrate the degree of their integration into the imperial administrative system.

5. The vertical structure of power - local chiefs subordinate to distant chiefs, and distant chiefs subordinate to sultans-rulers - coexisted with the possibility of direct appeals and reports to the regional administration. This ensured the flexibility of the system and transformed distant and local chiefs into agents of imperial governance.

6. The education of Kazakh children from the families of distant and local chiefs at the Kazakh school attached to the Border Commission evidences a form of "social engineering" aimed at forming a new nomadic elite educated in Russian institutions and serving as intermediaries between the nomadic population and the regional authorities.

7. Distant and local chiefs represented a hybrid form of authority. On the one hand, they were representatives of imperial power, as they were appointed by the regional administration; on the other hand, they were representatives of Kazakh nomadic society, defending the interests of their clans.

Scientific and practical significance

The dissertation contributes to the development of Kazakhstani historical scholarship and promotes the growth of public historical consciousness. The findings of the study make it possible to draw on the experience of the historical past in developing systems of administrative governance. The results may be incorporated into curricula and educational publications on the modern history of Kazakhstan.

Approbation of the dissertation

The main results and conclusions of the research were published between 2020 and 2025 in conference proceedings (2 articles), in journals recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Science and Higher Education

of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2 articles), and in journals indexed in the Scopus database, Quartile Q1 (2 articles) - a total of six articles. Individual sections of the study were presented as papers at major international scientific conferences, including “Change and Challenge” (University of Liverpool Annual History PGR Conference, 2022); “The Problem of Social Mobility in Kazakh Nomadic Society of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Forms, Opportunities, and Motives” at the European Society for Central Asian Studies (ESCAS) conference in 2023; and the international conference “The Russian Empire as a Great Power and Multi-Ethnic Polity,” organized by the PAULSEN Foundation in the United Kingdom on 27–30 June 2024.

Structure of the dissertation work. The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a list of sources and literature, and appendices.