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NOMADIC SYSTEM OF KALMYKS IN LATE XVIII–EARLY XIX CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper studies the changes in the system of seasonal migration of the Kalmyks in late XVIII–early XIX century. The partial retreat of Kalmyks in 1771 has changed the system of Kalmyks' nomadic life. The main enactment of the Russian administration on the way to the destruction of the old traditional nomadic life was the restriction for Torghut khanate to roam to the left bank of Volga river for them not to retreat to Dzungaria. The restriction caused huddling of the Kalmyk khanate's cattle and lead to a new redistribution of land of nomads which was complicated by the absence of Khan, the main master of nomadic lands. The internal strifes in the Kalmyks' society caused by dynastic controversies forced the Russian administration to cancel the centralized power among the Kalmyks and hand the functions of the nomadic land master over to the Astrakhan's governor who was not ready to perform unusual functions. This created conditions for conflicts for nomadic lands between Torghut and Dörben khanates. The increasing tension in the relations between the Kalmyk khanates caused the Russian administration in 1820 to pay attention to the distribution of territories between the khanates. After that, the issue of summer and winter nomadic lands of Kalmyk khanates finally started to get fixed. Only by early 1830s after tremendous efforts of khanate overseers, all Kalmyk khanates received their nomadic lands. Thus, under the pressure of Russian administration policy, the system of Kalmyk nomadic territories underwent appreciable alteration.

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Keywords: System of nomadic territories, administration policy, traditional culture.



1. Introduction

For centuries, the basis for the existence of Kalmyk people was extensive cattle breeding during seasonal migration. Strong dependence of the Kalmyks' household on natural and climatic conditions and its appreciable degree of specialization for a long time have been the foundation of stability and invariability of the traditional nomadic society. Under such conditions only natural disasters—droughts, blizzards and epizootic diseases could lead to hunger and loss of cattle, which conditioned short-term social crises and shocks of nomadic state principles.

During the period of Kalmyk khanate in XVII–XVIII centuries, persistent territories of summer and winter migrations were formed by the khanates of two largest subethnic groups of Kalmyks, Torghuts and Dörbens. The main master of all the khanates was Khan who distributed pasture lands among the khanates. Every year he was approving the nomadic territories for khanates and reminded this to the khanate owners through their representatives (Batyrov, 2014). An important difference of the Kalmyk nomadic life were seasonal migrations across Volga river by the majority of Kalmyk khanates, primarily Torghut ones. Every year, Torghut khanates were staying on the left bank of Volga river, and from spring to late fall they roamed on the right bank (Shenian, 1847). The exception was Torghut khanate of Dorzhi Nazarov which was on the right bank of Volga river to cover the boundaries of the khanate from attacks of Kazakhs. Also, the exception included Dörben khanates which constantly roamed on the left bank of Volga river.

2. Problem Statement

Mechanisms of Kalmyk people adaptation in the conditions of negative changes connected with the reduction of nomadic territories.

3. Research Questions

The object of the paper is to investigate the system of Kalmyk nomadic territories affected by the administration policy of the Russian Empire and the changes in the demographic balance between two main subethnic groups of Kalmyks.

4. Purpose of the Study

The work is aimed at the study of the changes to the system of traditional nomadic life of Kalmyk people in late XVIII–early XIX centuries.

5. Research Methods

The main methodological principle of this work are the principle of historicism and objectivity in the estimation of specific facts and phenomena in historical context. Depending on certain situations, logical top-down or down-top approaches were used. The main method of investigation is historically-genetic which envisages consecutive discovery of the changes to the system of Kalmyk nomadic life during is historical development.

6. Findings

After the migration of the major part of Kalmyk people to Dzungaria in 1771, the place of the main master of nomadic territories was taken by the son of Khan Donduk-Ombo, Aleksey Dondukov. The coming to power of A. Dondukov triggered violent struggle between Torghut noions related to the ruling dynasty of Torghut Khans for the right to replace the Khan. The Russian government turned out to be not ready to settle the problems of Kalmyk people and withdrew from solving the problem with the proposal to Kalmyk grand people to solve the problem of single authority by themselves. Indeed, the Astrakhan governor N.A. Beketov even offered the Torghut noion, Yandyk, to solve the issue of superiority over the Kalmyks by agreements or, interestingly, by “throwing the dice”. Dörben masters also actively joined this struggle. The thing is that to Dzungaria mainly traveled Torghuts, which lead to decreased number of Torghut khanates as compared to Dörben ones. Under such conditions, the Dörben masters no longer wanted obeying the entrenched status quo persisting from the time of Kalmyk khanate when Dörben khanates were playing side roles and depended on Torghut Khans. On their turn, Torghut noions did not even think about the election of the Khan from Dörben or Khoshut noions. On August 4, 1771, the master of the Ikitsokhurovsky khanate, Asarkho, wrote in dudgeon to Astrakhan governor N.A. Beketov that right now, the disciples of Khan Ayuki (i.e. Torghut noions) “control Khoshots and Dörben”.

The internal strifes in the Kalmyks’ society caused by dynastic controversies forced the Russian administration – for not to cause the discontent of Kalmyk khanate masters and make the rest of the Kalmyks follow the first ones to Dzungaria—to make a rather radical step and completely liquidate the central power among the Kalmyks. The rescript of Ekaterina II as of October 19, 1771 stated that the Khan as the master of nomadic territories hands his power directly to Astrakhan governor to whom the Kalmyk khanate owners should formally obey. From that time on, every khanate owner was controlling his people independently of others and could judge and punish them according to Kalmyk laws and customs. The mediator in their relations was Astrakhan governor who was to perform general observance and control over Kalmyk nomadic territories.

The main results of khanate cancellation for Kalmyk cattle breeding was the disruption of the stable system of nomadic life of the Kalmyks residing in the Russian Empire. The first enactment of the Russian administration on the way to the destruction of the old traditional nomadic life was the restriction for Torghut khanate to roam to the left bank of Volga river, because of the danger of the rest Torghuts to flee to Dzungaria (Nebolsin, 1852). The restriction caused huddling of the Kalmyk khanate’s cattle and lead to a new redistribution of land of nomads which was considerably complicated by the absence of Khan, the main master of nomadic lands. The Astrakhan governor and his administration could not physically execute their obligations due to the absence of necessary expertise and authority among Kalmyk khanate owners. The officials were understanding that the deterioration of nomadic cattle breeding of some Kalmyk khanates is directly connected with the restrictions of the Russian administration (Materials for household statistics of Russia issued by Emperor’s Unrestricted Economic Society, 1853). Indeed, the Astrakhan governor N. A. Beketov wrote to Astrakhan governor's office that in line with the reports of the overseer of Torghut khanate owner Yandyk, who was a Kalmyk language learner under the supervision of I. Lephyokhin, that the population of his khanate “due to the lacking cattle fodder on the uphill side and general leanness of the cattle” several times asked the permission to cross Volga river (to get to the pasture side). In such

conditions, N.A. Beketov chose a half-way solution and ordered commendants Chernoyarsky and Enotaevskiy to allow cattle-free Kalmyk families from the Barang Erketen Zaisang tribe to sail to the islands of Volga river.

Only in 1782, the Astrakhan governor M.M. Zhukov, answering the multiple requests of the representatives of Torghut khanates allowed them to wander on the pasture side of Volga river. However, being afraid of them crossing the border over the Urals, he allowed them to transport to the other bank of Volga river only limited amount of families, incomplete khanates: “From Tyumen khanate allow transporting to the pasture side not more than 400 tents, plus Mashin’s and Tsagan Kichikov’s khanate Zaisangs Badzhit and Gabun Dodzhu with their Kalmyks”.

In general, by the end of XVIII century, Torghut khanates (Bagatsokhuroskiy, Ikitsokhurovskiy and Yandykovskiy) were wandering not far from each other on the banks of Volga river and until Sarpa urochushe. They were overwintering on the banks of Kuma river. The Khoshut khanate in summer was wandering along the banks of Sarpa river until rivers Vyazovka and Volga, while they overwintered on the banks of Kuma river. A separate case was Dörben khanate, which in summer was wandering along the rivers Kurmoyarsky Aksai, Aksai Esaulovskiy, Mishkovka, Donskaya tsaritsa, Karpovka and Sal, while they were overwintering on Manych river.

On the major part of the territory, on the uphill bank of Volga river, Dörben khanates had wandering for ages, which created conditions for fights for nomadic lands between Torghut and Dörben khanates. Indeed, in 1797, the officials of Kalmykia government have composed a report addressed to the Astrakhan governor N.Ya. Arshenevskiy where they noted that “Dörben owners Chuchei and Babul with their khanates every day go to Kuma river” and annually overwinter near Mozhara Lake. This inevitably created conditions for future conflicts especially because Dörben nomads were overwintering in urochishche Kek Aryl.

The consequences of old nomadic life system disruption are reflected in the report of governor M.M. Zhukov as of January 28, 1785 which contains all complaints of Kalmyk khanate owners regarding nomadic lands. He wrote that after the Kalmyks were prohibited to go to the left bank of Volga river, on the uphill road, “on Kizlyar road from Astrakhan post offices were established; along Kuma river, along Tomuzlov and along this bank of Don river Russian people have settled; and along Volga river, Cossack stanitsas were established and they do not pass Kalmyks to nomadic lands, so they have to roam from early spring until late fall in steppes in cleared lands”, which causes “cattle diseases and plague, so the Kalmyks become poor and weak; if they will stay in those places for longer, shortly they will be unable to serve to the country”; quotes from (Batmaev, 2002).

One of the first attempts of Tsar administration to establish new nomadic life system was the Decree issued by Alexander I as of December 24, 1805 which urged the Astrakhan governor V.D. Tenishev to gather in Astrakhan all Kalmyk khanate owners and masters of state khanates to discuss the project of Major General of Astrakhan garrison regiment I.I. Zavalishin to determine the territory for “migration of Kalmyks and other Mohammedanists” “by convincing them that such process only expresses the state care about improving their future nomadic life”. However, the overseer of Kalmyk people P.P. Krupinskiy who received the order to gather the Kalmyk khanate owners reported to V.D. Tenishev that all khanate owners steered away from the gathering due to different reasons.

Early XIX century was marked by a number of conflicts between Kalmyk khanates for nomadic lands. For example, on May 1, 1822, a private Kalmyk overseer, lieutenant E.K. Fleisher reported to Astrakhan civil governor I. I. Popov that on April 19, the khanate of Torghut owner Tseren-Ubushi came to Sukhota river to pasture his cattle over all May along near lands of urochishe Burgusta, “where they wanted annually continuing public prayer as per Kalmyk ritual that is called Khurul Khurkho, and at this time, all khanates should be in place and those in control are not permitted to poison these lands”. However, Dörben Erdeni-taisha Tundutov who came to the same territory as the owner of a larger khanate tried to banish Torghuts from those lands by ordering his servants to bring over large horse herds (up to 5000 horses) and pass them through the encampment to force the khanate to give in the lands to him. The khanate population dependent on Tseren-Ubushi was mainly breeding sheep, so their owners had to leave the territory to save their small cattle from onrushing horse herds. By doing so, E. Tundutov had captured the comfortable nomadic lands of Kalmyks of Torghut owner Tseren-Ubushi near river Burgusta and forced them leave. During the consequent investigations, the small-Dörben owner E. Tundutov explicitly stated that “starting from our arrival under the power of Great Sovereigns and Emperors we wander and live not only near Burgusta river, but in all urochishas of Irgen”.

The increasing tension in the relations between the Kalmyk khanates caused the Russian administration in 1820 to pay attention to the distribution of territories between the khanates. After that, the issue of summer and winter nomadic lands of Kalmyk khanates finally started to get fixed. Only by early 1830s after tremendous efforts of khanate overseers, all Kalmyk khanates received their nomadic territories (Popov, 1839). For instance, the reports of khanate overseers to the Chief overseer of Kalmyk people A.M. Fadeev, specify the khanate territories. Indeed, the Bagatsokhurov khanate was migrating along the uphill bank of Volga river beginning from the land boundaries owned by Khoshoutov khanate and until the boundaries of small-Dörben khanate: “Assuming about 200, and from Volga river to the steppes no less than hundred versts. Flood plain Tsagan Aman, from Volga river to Akhtuba river along 10, and between boundaries of Cossack stanitsas Kopanovskaya and Betlyaninskaya with pass left for migration of Kalmyks from different khanates from uphill to meadow part, and from it to uphill side of the steppe along nine versts. But the Kalmyks do not use this pass anymore. Because of willful settlement of it by peasants who came from the upper territories of the province”.

7. Conclusion

Thus, from late XVII century, the system of seasonal nomad migrations elaborated after the liquidation of Kalmyk khanate had been endangered by the policy of Russian administration. The main enactment of the Russian administration which lead to the destruction of the old traditional nomadic life was the restriction for Torghut khanate to roam to the left bank of Volga river. The restriction caused huddling of the Kalmyk khanate's cattle and lead to a redistribution of land by Kalmyk khanate owners which was further complicated by the absence of Khan, the main master of nomadic lands. The internal strifes in the Kalmyks' society caused by dynastic controversies forced the Russian administration to cancel the centralized power among the Kalmyks and hand the functions of the nomadic land master over to the Astrakhan's governor who was not ready to perform unusual functions. This created conditions for conflicts for nomadic lands between Torghut and Dörben khanates. The increasing tension in the relations between

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