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Horizons of Historical Memory of 19th century Kazakh Enlighteners and the Influence of the Intellectual Traditions of the Russian Empire

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the problem of transformation and evolution of the narratives and horizons of historical memory within Kazakh society, drawing on the works of Kazakh enlighteners of the 19th century. The authors highlight the influence of the intellectual traditions of the Russian Empire, shaped through active mutual exchange and cultural convergence with prominent representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia, namely Chokan Valikhanov, Abai Kunanbayev, and Ibray Altynsarin. The study addresses the historiographical problem of intellectual transfer between the Russian and Kazakh intelligentsia.

The research draws on archival materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian State Historical Archive, and ego-documents (personal correspondence with Russian scholars and officials, travel diaries, and manuscripts), as well as scientific articles by Kazakh authors published in the journals of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society. These sources shed light on how the enlighteners' ideas were presented and perceived in the 19th century, alongside memoirs of Russian officials, scientists, and travelers.

Employing the comparative method, traditional in historical research, the analysis of official and personal archival sources enables the identification of general patterns and distinctive peculiarities of the imperial policy's influence on the Kazakh intellectual elite during the transition of Kazakh society to the modern era. The works of the aforementioned enlighteners offer an important case for exploring the development of historical knowledge and narratives of historical memory.

Keywords: historical memory, intellectual history, Kazakh enlighteners, historical agency, cultural memory, Russian Empire.

1. Introduction

In 2025, Kazakhstan is celebrating at the national level the 190th anniversary of Chokan Valikhanov and the 180th anniversary of Abai Kunanbayev – eminent Kazakh enlighteners whose works were deeply influenced by the intellectual traditions of the 19th century Russian Empire and who shaped the cultural narratives of the Kazakh intelligentsia for the following century. Despite a century-long historiography, a number of questions within this field remain unexplored, not only in terms of factual detail but also of conceptual interpretation. Of particular interest is the theme of the horizons of historical memory that existed in the minds of the Kazakh enlighteners Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, and Abai Kunanbayev, and which manifested in their scholarly and literary works as historical and cultural reflections. What historical chronology and cultural genealogy of their people did these intellectuals envision? What place in world history did they ascribe to the Kazakhs as subjects of the universal historical process? And how was this vision shaped by the intellectual transfer from the Russian intelligentsia? Equally significant is the question of reverse influence – whether Kazakh enlighteners, while representing to the empire both the fruits

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of Kazakh-Russian intellectual rapprochement and, at the same time, enriching the imperial classification, worldview, and system of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Eurasia, contributed to reshaping the Empire's own historical and cultural narratives. By examining the works of these Kazakh enlighteners, this study seeks to explore how historical knowledge and narratives of historical memory developed in dialogue with scholars of the Russian Empire.

2. Materials and methods

The study of the images and plots of cultural memory related to the scholarly and creative legacy of Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, and Abai Kunanbayev in dialogue with the Russian intelligentsia requires a comprehensive approach to the analysis of diverse materials. These three outstanding figures of Kazakh history and culture of the 19th century were both subjects and objects of a complex process of creating modern cultural memory.

To conduct an in-depth and multifaceted analysis of this topic, a wide range of sources is required:

1) Archival materials – correspondence between administrative bodies and official records of the 19th century that characterize the Russian Empire's official attitude towards Ch. Valikhanov, I. Altynsaryn, and A. Kunanbayev, as well as their place in the imperial hierarchy. This includes documents from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (TsGA RK. F. 829, TsGA RK. F. 64, TsGA RK. F. 25), the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA. F. 1284), etc.

2) Ego-documents – personal correspondence with Russian scholars and officials, travel diaries, and manuscripts containing reflections on the history of the Kazakhs, self-perceptions, and reactions to imperial influence. Published versions of their letters and travel journals are available (Valikhanov, 1947; Konshin, 1994).

3) Scientific publications by Valikhanov and Altynsarin in Russian Imperial Geographical Society journals, providing insight into how their ideas were presented and received in the 19th century (Zapiski IRGO..., 1904; Altynsarin, 1879);

4) Complete works and selected writings, including poetry, prose, and scholarly essays, which reveal both explicit and implicit notions of Kazakh culture and history (Valikhanov, 1984-1985; Altynsarin, 1957; Abai, 1971).

5) Memoirs of Russian officials, scholars, travelers, and Kazakh contemporaries who personally knew Valikhanov (Potanin, 1896; Akhmetova, 1964), Altynsarin (Il'minskij, 1891), and Abai (Bukeikhanov, 2004).

6) Secondary scholarship analyzing the scientific and literary heritage of the Kazakh enlighteners (Auezov, Kenzhebayev, 1945; Auezov, 1971).

7) Visual sources – drawings by Ch. Valikhanov, which were created during his travels.

Given the diversity of these materials, a multi-methodological approach is necessary. A comparative historical analysis of both official archival sources and personal documents will be used to identify shared patterns and distinctive features of imperial policy's influence on the Kazakh intellectual elite during the transitional period of modernity. Comparing the life trajectories and activities of Valikhanov, Altynsarin, and Abai will help to identify the common foundations of their views on the Kazakh past. A qualitative analysis of their scholarly and literary works will focus on identifying key words, images, and narrative motifs of cultural memory connected to Kazakh identity and expressed in the creative narratives of these figures, which gained recognition within the Russian Empire.

The study will also employ discourse analysis to examine how certain images and plots of cultural memory were constructed and transmitted in the authors' texts, with attention to their semantic transformations across imperial and national contexts.

An important theoretical framework is provided by Memory Studies, particularly Aleida Assmann's concept of the relationship between personal, social, and cultural memory in her monograph *"The Long Shadow of the Past: Memorial Culture and Historical Politics"* (Assmann, 2018). Assmann emphasizes that personal memories inhabit a specific social environment and generational horizon, influencing individuals' temporal orientation (Assmann, 2018: 22). She also notes that the transition from social to cultural memory marks a profound shift, achievable through symbolic mediators that secure memory over the long term. Cultural memory, unlike individual memory, spans periods defined by the preservation of signs, enabling individuals to form not only personal and social but also cultural self-identification (Assmann, 2018: 31-32).

The application of this comprehensive methodological framework will enable a nuanced understanding of the formation and transformation of cultural memory images and narratives in the works of Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, and Abai Kunanbayev, revealing both direct and mediated influences of the Russian Empire on these processes. This, in turn, will shed light on the dynamics of Kazakh cultural identification in dialogue with the intellectual traditions of the Russian intelligentsia and its subsequent evolution.

3. Discussion

The 19th century became a turning point in the history of the Kazakh steppe: alongside the political and administrative integration into the Russian Empire, there occurred a rapprochement in the spheres of knowledge, education, and culture. A key role in this process was played by the Kazakh intellectual elite –

Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, and Abai Kunanbayev – whose activities came to symbolize a cultural transfer, a synthesis of local traditions with the imperial scholarly and educational project.

Chokan Valikhanov made an essential contribution to ethnography, source studies, and the historical self-awareness of the Kazakhs. He was the first to subject folk epics, in particular, “Manas”, to scholarly analysis, interpreting them as historical chronicles of collective memory rather than merely mythological texts. His critical examination of Dzungar sources, his description of Ablai’s campaign to Kashgaria, and his systematization of *adat* and shamanic practices not only presented Kazakh culture within the scholarly domain but also strengthened the perception of the Kazakhs as a people with their own intellectual history. As one of the founders of historical scholarship in Soviet Kazakhstan of the mid-20th century, academician A. Margulan, wrote: “He was well acquainted with many sources written in Persian, Arabic, and Turkic, which he studied long and painstakingly. Later, Ch. Valikhanov examined the well-known works “Babur-nama”, “Tarikh-i-Rashidi”, “Tazkirah-i Khwajagan”, whose data he used in his own works” (Margulan, 1985: 69). “Of considerable scholarly value are Ch. Valikhanov’s studies on the history and ethnography of the Kazakh people, as well as his essays on socio-political relations in the Kazakh steppe. These include “Ablai”, “The Genealogy of the Kirghiz”, “The Armament of the Kirghiz in Ancient Times and Their Military Equipment”, “Shona-batyr”, “Notes on Judicial Reform”, “On Islam in the Steppe”, “Traces of Shamanism among the Kirghiz”, “On the Nomadism of the Kirghiz”, etc.” (Margulan 1985: 70).

Ibray Altynsarin, as an educator and reformer, created an educational system oriented towards adapting Russian Enlightenment principles to the Kazakh context. He not only opened schools but also formed a new social stratum – the secular Kazakh intelligentsia. Altynsarin translated and adapted educational texts, instilling the values of rationalism, tolerance, and diligence.

Abai Kunanbayev became the voice of a philosophical and ethical reorientation of Kazakh thought. His poetry and “Words of Edification” served as a cultural bridge between East and West, tradition and modernity. He translated the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Krylov, while also reinterpreting the ideas of Belinsky and Chernyshevsky in the light of Kazakh moral philosophy. The principal conclusion of his work was a call for self-improvement, education, and critical thinking.

Contemporary research emphasizes that cultural development in Kazakh society during the 19th and early 20th centuries took place within the framework of the imperial Enlightenment project, aimed at the administrative integration of the Kazakh steppe. The Russian Empire pursued its “civilizing mission” through the introduction of schools, print culture, and institutions within the cultural hierarchies of that era.

Many Kazakh figures not only accepted new forms but actively adapted them. The Kazakh elite often acted as subjects rather than mere objects of modernization, reworking European ideas to fit the internal needs of the steppe.

Cultural construction under imperial conditions became a space for encounters, debates, and collaboration. The imperial infrastructure – printing, schools, archives – made it possible to record, conceptualize, and integrate the oral culture of the Kazakhs into the global intellectual context.

The emerging Kazakh intelligentsia not only assimilated elements of European culture but also transformed them, laying the foundations of the Kazakh national idea, in which tradition was not rejected but became a resource for modernization. Their intellectual legacy was not an imitation but an autonomous response to the challenges of the time. The cultural transfer of the 19th century was not a process of assimilation, but rather the birth of Kazakh modernity in dialogue with the empire. As a result of complex processes unfolding in a cultural space where such diverse intellectual traditions met, the Kazakh milieu produced thinkers with composite intellectual biographies. The scholar of Kazakhstan’s intellectual history A. Kodar wrote: “... in order to understand Abai, one needs several levels of approach: first, the perception of Abai as a phenomenon of European culture; second, the Islamic layer; third, the Turkic-Persian; and fourth and final, the Turkic. The most interesting thing is that, despite the colorful diversity of its components, Abai’s work strikes one with its integrity and consistency. It is not by chance that he wrote of himself: “I am the completion of the old” (Kodar, 1997: 81).

The Kazakh intelligentsia was not a passive object of enlightenment but actively transformed external influences, integrating them into their own cultural system. Thus, interaction with Russian scholarly and cultural structures did not so much erode as transform Kazakh cultural identity, transferring it from oral to written form, from the ethnographic to the intellectual domain.

Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, and Abai Kunanbayev not only became key figures of the modernization of Kazakh society but also set the framework for dialogue between tradition and science, the local and the universal. In their works, the historical consciousness of Kazakh society found its voice. Horizons of historical memory were formed – from the oral memory of several generations, with the ethical potential of its folkloric plots, to scientifically verifiable knowledge of the nation’s centuries-long history. In our previous works, examining the cultural narratives that emerged in the Kazakh steppe in the process of its integration into the legal and socio-cultural system of the Russian Empire (Krupko et al., 2023: 662-670), (Dalayeva, 2020). “In the oral spiritual heritage, Valikhanov was the first to discern the national mentality and to strive to present it to the scholarly community. In his research, the scholar often used the phrase “the people’s memory” when analyzing issues related to historical consciousness” (Serubayeva et al., 2024: 913).

4. Results

The policy of historical memory in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a multifaceted process aimed at the administrative control, the integration of newly acquired territories into the legal and sociocultural framework of the empire, and the consolidation of the aspirations of the polyethnic population's elites.

In the late 19th century, the Oriental Commission of the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society set itself the goal of studying and publishing Oriental monuments found within the Russian Empire. In this regard, on 27 November 1895 (No.1576), the chair of the Society, Countess Uvarova, addressed the military governor of the Turgai oblast, Major General Barabash: "Extracts from the *Turgai Gazette*, reporting on ancient historical monuments preserved within the Turgai steppes. ...The Society takes the liberty of most humbly requesting Your Excellency to forward to the Society all issues of the *Turgai Gazette* from which the aforementioned information was drawn. At the same time, the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society has the honor to request Your Excellency to kindly inform the Society whether there might be in Orenburg a photographer capable of competently travelling around those parts of the Turgai oblast where ancient historical monuments are or may be located, and of photographing both their general views and separate detailed elements and plans" (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 1455. L. 1–1 ob.) In a reply dated 11 December 1895, B. Fishman was recommended: "The photographing of historical monuments in the steppe is agreed to be undertaken by the Orenburg photographer Mr. Fishman" (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 1455. L. 2).

Such initiatives continued into the early 20th century. In fulfillment of 'the circular instruction of the Minister of the Internal Affairs of 6 September 1901, No.10', information was submitted on monuments located in the Syr-Darya oblast. The descriptions included both Muslim monuments (the Mausoleum of Karakhan; the tomb of the saint Tek-Tur-Maz / Shamakhmut Khan in Aulie-Ata city; the mosque over the grave of the saint Hazret Sultan Khoja Akhmet in Turkestan) and official monuments (the chapel in the Kazalinsk city park in memory of Emperors Alexander II and Alexander III) (RGIA. F.1284. Op. 188. D. 94. L. 8.–21); and in the Akmolinsk oblast – a wooden arch decorated at the Ilyinsky suburb in memory of the 1891 visit to Omsk by His Imperial Highness, the heir to the throne, Tsarevich Nicholas (later Nicholas II) (RGIA. F.1284. Op. 188. D. 43. L. 2–7).

During the period of social and cultural transformations of the 19th century, when the emerging national intelligentsia in various regions of the empire gained the opportunity to construct historical agency on modernized foundations, Kazakh enlighteners such as Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, and Abai Kunanbayev, at different epistemological and institutional levels, turned to the study and representation of the cultural heritage of the Kazakhs as the foundation for modernization and the attainment of historical agency. Each, to varying degrees, relied upon the existing intellectual traditions of the Russian Empire. All three thinkers employed narratives of historical memory as instruments of enlightenment, seeking to synthesize traditional and modern systems of knowledge across multiple historical and cultural horizons.

Among the representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia discussed in this article, Chokan Valikhanov (1835–1865) stands out as, in many respects, a pioneer and systematizer of ethnographic knowledge, incorporating it into scientific narratives of historical memory and into the Russian imperial knowledge system on the peoples of Eurasia. By undertaking systemic study of Kazakh history, ethnography, and folklore – collecting and analyzing oral traditions, genealogies (*shezhire*), customs and beliefs – Chokan Valikhanov, on the one hand, scientifically recorded historical memory embedded in the cultural heritage of the people, and on the other, represented his nation to scholars of the Russian Empire, integrating Kazakh culture into the historical picture of the world.

"The first task of Valikhanov was to study his own people and introduce them to the Russian public" (Yadrintsev, 1985: 277). In 1854, as a member of Colonel K.K. Gutkovsky's expedition, Ch. Valikhanov visited the Kapal fortification, where he recorded legends and oral traditions of the Senior Zhuz Kazakhs. Earlier still, he had studied the architectural monuments of Butaga (on the Nura River), Djuban-Ana and Aitbulat (on the Sarysu River) in Central Kazakhstan. In 1856–1858, in the Semirechye region, he investigated the ancient urban sites of Almaty, Koilyk, and Almalyk, collected ancient coins, and made sketches from nature of Tamgalytas (on the Ili River), rock carvings in the Chulaktau mountains and near the Dzungarian Gate, and stone statues on the northern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul and on the Ayaguz River.

His research reveals a scientific, historical approach to the mythological and epic heritage of nomadic peoples. A separate topic is the comparative analysis of cultures undertaken by Chokan Valikhanov in his works: "Chinese writers have preserved for us certain customs observed in the burial of kings among the Xiongnu, Khitan, and other shamanistic nomads. European travelers who visited the Mongols speak of similar customs among the Cumans and the Mongols. If we compare them with the Kirghiz customs, we shall find a remarkable unity of ideas and even similarity of images" (TsGA RK. F. 829. Op. 1. D. 1a. L. 132).

Through his prodigious erudition and his intercourse with eminent Russian intellectuals of the 19th century, Chokan Valikhanov came to be numbered among the European scholarly tradition, which in the 19th century, was engaged not merely in the discovery of hitherto unknown lands, but, by the steady accumulation of knowledge, in the construction of an ethnographic and cultural classification of the peoples of the world. Within this classificatory endeavor there gradually took shape such intellectual currents as evolutionism, the mythological school, historicism, etc.

All this, mediated through the Russian scientific tradition, in one way or another determined the conceptual direction of the works of Chokan Valikhanov. His research transcended the bounds of Kazakh culture, embracing the study of neighboring peoples. This enabled him to situate Kazakh culture and history within a broader framework, discerning both their commonalities and their singular features, and, through these local episodes of Kazakh history, to apprehend universal patterns. In so doing, he was able to determine the horizon of historical memory necessary for the subsequent integration of the Kazakhs into the cultural history of the peoples of the world.

In this respect, Chokan Valikhanov stands as a key figure in the cultural transfer of the 19th century. His work served as an important link between the Kazakh tradition and European scholarship, bringing the folk historical memory of the people with academic science.

In his letter to Berezin, Valikhanov writes: "The Kazakh people (as we call ourselves) emerged from the union of various tribes no earlier than the 14th century; they are not the ancient people about whom Firdausi wrote" (Strelkova, 1983: 93).

Comparing the oral traditions of Kirghiz and Kazakh antiquity with the accounts of Abu al-Ghazi, Father of Iakinf, Rubruk, from the works of Russian researchers of Siberia and Central Asia such as G.I. Spassky and P.A. Chikhachev, as well as various European authors, Chokan Valikhanov repeatedly sought to reconstruct the routes by which peoples and tribes moved across the centuries. Ch. Valikhanov made extensive excerpts from Jalayiri's "Jami' al-tawarikh", translating its principal chapters into Russian for the first time, providing commentary, and appending a glossary of Eastern terms to his translation. He also compiled extensive notes from the "Shaybani-nama" and Abu al-Ghazi's "Shajara-i Turk" (according to the edition of I.N. Berezin), on the basis of which he later compiled an important theoretical work "The Genealogy of the Kirghiz. Valikhanov defines "Jami' al-tawarikh" as a rare historical treatise, a compilation of Kazakh folk historical traditions of the 15th-16th centuries. He was well acquainted with numerous narrative sources written in Persian, Arabic, and Turkic, on which he worked long and meticulously. Subsequently, Ch. Valikhanov studied the well-known works "Babur-nama", "Tarikh-i-Rashidi", "Tazkirah-i Khwajagan", drawing upon their materials in his own research (Margulan, 1985a: 69).

One of the central objectives pursued by Valikhanov was the interpretation and systematization of Kazakh cultural and historical heritage. As he explained: "*Jir* literally means 'rhapsody'. The verb *jirlamak* means to speak in a recitative manner. All steppe *jirs* are customarily performed in recitative style to the accompaniment of the *kobyz*. The subjects of a *jir* are usually the life and deeds of some renowned folk hero of ancient times" (Valikhanov, 1985: 280). He further observed: "...by the later period of my stay in the steppe, *jirs* were already considered as an outdated form of poetry" (Valikhanov, 1985: 281).

His works – ranging from studies on Kazakh *batyrs* and the epic "Manas" to ethnographic descriptions of the daily life and customs of the Kazakhs – represented not merely a compilation of facts, but a methodological shift: a transition from a sacred, clan-based mode of preserving historical memory to its scientific verification and integration into the global cultural sphere. In deepening the horizon of historical memory, he paid considerable attention to references to the ethnonym "Kazakh": "While collecting information about the Kazakh people, I take the liberty of addressing you with the most humble request: should you, in the course of examining and reading various Eastern historians, happen to encounter anything regarding the word *Kazakh*, the concept of *kazachestvo* (in Arabic script), or the Kazakh people, kindly communicate it to your humble servant. This would oblige me greatly. Lacking any other sources at hand – apart from Abu al-Ghazi's history (Rumyantsev edition), your Sheibanids, and (a title in Arabic script) which is extremely important in this regard – I have no means of verifying Levshin's fragmentary reference in his "Description of the Kirghiz-Kaysak Hordes". As I suppose, the accounts of Arab historians contain nothing on the Kazakhs, for I am convinced that this people emerged no earlier than the 14th century, upon the disintegration of Jochi's Ulus. Katib Chelebi, as can be seen from Levshin's history, says something about the Tatar Kazakhs. It would be interesting to know when this geographer lived, and to have this account in Russian" (Valikhanov, 1985: 171-172).

In a historiosophical sense, Valikhanov's research marked the beginning of a transformation in the historical consciousness of the Kazakhs. The oral tradition (*shezhire*, *dastans*, *anyzdar*), which for centuries had served as the primary repository of collective memory, began to evolve into written form – subject to scholarly analysis and verification. In "On the Kirghiz-Kaysak Great Horde", Ch. Valikhanov noted: "Ancient mounds and barrows in the Zaili region attest to the ancient presence of certain peoples. The domains of the Uisun, the Uighurs, and the Dzungars succeeded one another" (Valikhanov, 1985: 181). In "On Kirghiz-Kaysak Graves (Molas) and Antiquities in General", Ch. Valikhanov wrote: "Throughout the steppe there are scattered numerous ancient and more recent graves, barrows, mounds, etc. These mute monuments of Kaysak life are far more important in geographical than in historical terms, for the names of the buried remain forever in the mouths of the people, and the Kaysak aligns his route with the location of these graves" (Valikhanov, 1985: 190).

As A.Kh. Margulan noted in his commentary to the publication of the collected works of Ch.Ch. Valikhanov: "The idea of collecting Kazakh historical traditions arose in Valikhanov back in 1852, during his studies at the Siberian Cadet Corps. According to G.N. Potanin, Valikhanov reflected on this question more than once. "He dreamed of making discoveries in the ancient history of the East through the

data provided by folk traditions and the remnants of Kirghiz antiquity. The work was most likely written in 1855–1856” (Margulan, 1985b: 383).

Valikhanov perceived Kazakh history not as closed or isolated from the world, but as part of a broader Eurasian and global historical and cultural framework. Through scholarly reflection on the past, he sought to reveal to the scientific world the agency of the Kazakh people and to demonstrate their contribution to universal civilization. This, in turn, influenced representatives of the Russian intelligentsia. For example, the distinguished orientalist and folklorist Grigory Potanin, who was a longtime friend with Chokan Valikhanov, wrote in his work “Eastern Motifs in Western European Medieval Epic”: “The neglect of the steppe peoples by scholars impedes the development of science. The establishment of correct views on the role of these ‘barbarians’ in the history of spiritual and cultural borrowings is hindered by ... a false historical perspective ... and the timidity of thought enslaved by routine views and routine beliefs. Perhaps it will be recognized as unprofitable for science to continue disregarding steppe traditions” (Potanin, 1899: 856).

In the second half of the 19th century, a new cultural and scientific paradigm was emerging within the Russian Empire, wherein the peoples of its peripheries began to partake in the creation of their own scientific knowledge. In this regard, the scholarly dialogue between Chokan Valikhanov and Grigory Nikolayevich Potanin (1835–1920) represented a significant episode of Eurasian interaction, founded on mutual interest and intellectual partnership. Both future researchers met at the Siberian Cadet Corps in Omsk – one of the few educational institutions of that time where representatives of Russian and Kazakh cultural milieus could come together. Their friendship and exchange of ideas laid the groundwork for a joint scientific orientation towards the study of Central Asia. Potanin, inspired by the example of Valikhanov, later became one of the foremost ethnographers and researchers of Tibet, Mongolia, and the Turkic peoples of Siberia. Thus, the scholarly collaboration between Valikhanov and Potanin stands as an important example of early intercultural scientific cooperation, in which for the first time the question was raised about the participation of indigenous peoples not only as ethnographic subjects but also as scientific agents themselves.

The educational mission of the Russian Empire, despite all its complexities, created conditions for the rapprochement between the Russian and Kazakh intelligentsia. The scientific milieu – embodied by such figures as Potanin, Maikov, and Dostoevsky – not only inspired Valikhanov, but also recognized him as a full-fledged member of the scientific community. This interaction carried the potential for collaboration, within the framework of which Kazakh culture gradually became an active subject of history. In a letter from A.N. Maikov to Ch.Ch. Valikhanov dated February 10, 1863, he wrote: “...By combining the finest achievements of European education and science with the scholarship of the East, you must introduce Europe to Asia. And the link between Asia and Europe is Russia. You should regard it as the rational arena for your intellectual activity” (Valikhanov, 1985: 206).

In 1887, G.N. Potanin raised the issue of publishing the works of Valikhanov. In June 1889, the Steppe Governor-General Kolpakovsky addressed this question to the secretary of the IRGS Veselovsky: “... the member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, Esaul Potanin, conveyed to me that Your Excellency has undertaken the task of publishing the notes left after the death of Colonel Valikhanov, and that my assistance in this publication may take the form of material support in the amount of three hundred rubles. Fully sharing in your undertaking and wishing for the works of this outstanding Kirghiz to appear in print as soon as possible, I most respectfully request you to inform me whether the aforementioned sum will be sufficient, and where I should forward the money. With the highest respect and complete devotion, I have the honor to remain your obedient servant” (TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 462. L. 67-67). As N. Veselovsky later recalled: “Despite my numerous commitments, I did not dare to decline this task, finding it unconditionally useful and necessary – both in memory of Chokan Valikhanov and in the interests of Oriental studies – and undertook the difficult burden of examining his papers” (Veselovsky, 1964: 150). The works of Ch.Ch. Valikhanov were published in the Proceedings of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1904 (Zapiski IRGO..., 1904).

The significance of Valikhanov extends far beyond the confines of the 19th century. His ideas continued to exert a profound influence on the development of Kazakh historiography and cultural self-identification throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. His approach to interpreting the history of the Kazakh people – critical and scholarly, yet at the same time respectful of traditions – became a guiding reference point for several generations of Kazakhstani scholars, writers, and public figures.

During the Soviet period, the figure of Valikhanov was officially recognized as a symbol of a progressive enlightener. His methodological approach – combining empirical observation with humanistic thought – became the foundation for the formation of a national historical school. This model, synthesizing traditional knowledge with critical scientific thinking, continued to develop. The growing interest in local sources, manuscripts, and ethnographic accounts finds a clear resonance in his works. On a cultural level, Chokan Valikhanov remains a symbol of the Kazakh intelligentsia – educated, open to the world, yet firmly rooted in its own history.

According to Potanin’s recollections, “Chokan lived alongside his contemporaries, shared his passions with them, yet was more concerned with the fate of people of the future...” (Strelkova, 1983: 4).

Chokan Valikhanov not only introduced the Kazakh steppe to the global scholarly community but also laid the foundations for a new historical subjectivity. As a result, the narratives of historical memory in

Kazakh society, which for centuries had been preserved primarily in oral form, entered a phase of transformation in the 19th century. The institutionalization of historical knowledge, the gradual spread of literacy, and the establishment of schools and libraries all contributed to the emergence of a new type of historical consciousness – one oriented not merely towards preserving the past, but towards interpreting it. This marked the transition of the Kazakh people's historical memory from an oral, sacred tradition to rational, verifiable knowledge integrated into the global scholarly culture. Through Valikhanov, Kazakh history acquired not only form, but also a voice – in dialogue with other cultures, in its own language of truth, and in its aspiration towards a future shaped by knowledge.

Ibray Altynsarin (1841–1889) regarded and employed education as both a transmitter and a custodian of cultural memory. In the 1860s, Ibray Altynsarin was only beginning his path, engaging in dialogue with N.I. Il'minskij and V.V. Grigoriev. In 1861, he was granted permission to open schools for Kazakhs in Turgai and Irgiz. For him, the school was seen as the foundation for preserving identity: Altynsarin viewed the education system as a key instrument for passing on cultural heritage and traditional morality to the younger generation. Instruction in the native language and history instilled fundamental values. His works reflect the didactic character of memory. In his textbooks and stories, Altynsarin drew on elements of oral folklore – parables, fairy tales, and legends – adapting them to make them instructive and to shape ethical norms of behavior based on traditional beliefs. Through narratives about virtues, hard work, and respect for elders, Altynsarin sought to raise a new generation capable of combining national traditions with the demands of modernity and of being useful to their people.

In Altynsarin's scholarly and pedagogical legacy, one finds a synthesis of the traditional and the modern. He did not simply preserve the past, but sought to integrate into it the elements of Russian and world culture, shaping a consciousness that was open yet deeply rooted in its own memory. As he stated, for example, in the preface to his *Chrestomathy*: "In compiling this chrestomathy, I had in view, first, that this book – being the first and yet the only one in our native language – might serve as a reader both for Kirghiz boys studying in Russian–Kirghiz educational institutions and for popular reading in general; and second, that the stories included in the book should be primarily in the spirit of the Kirghiz people. Therefore, the selection of stories for it presented no small difficulty, requiring careful consideration of each individual piece" (Altynsarin, 1957: 79).

As B.S. Suleimenov noted in his commentary on the story "Kipshak Seitkul" (Altynsarin, 1957: 81–83): "In writing the story "Kipshak Seitkul", Altynsarin drew on facts presented in Sultan Seydalin Tleu's study "On the Development of Agriculture in the Turgai River Basin", published in the "Proceedings of the Orenburg Branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society", Issue 1, 1870" (Suleimenov, 1957: 448). The plot foundations of such stories as "Baiuly", "Izbasty", "Satemir-khan", "Zhirenshe Sheshen", "Zhanibek-batyr", "Kara-batyr", "The Sage Lukban" were taken by Altynsarin from oral tradition. These stories were written between 1870 and 1878 and published in the "Kirghiz Chrestomathy" editions of 1879 and 1906, in "Mektubat", and in the "Selected Works" of Altynsarin in Kazakh, issued by the Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR in 1955 (Suleimenov, 1957: 448). I. Altynsarin did not merely translate but creatively reinterpreted the works of Russian educators, producing stories for Kazakh children that reflected the everyday life and psychological characteristics of nomads. This is evident from comparisons between the texts of even the most faithful adaptations of Paulson's stories and Altynsarin's own reworkings (Suleimenov, 1957: 451).

There are images drawn from cultural memory (world history): "The Queen Silinshi" is a story about how Queen Silinshi was the first to discover the method of producing silk – "Queen Silinshi lived 5000 years ago. The Chinese people have not forgotten their great queen to this day, honoring her memory each year and holding festivities in her name" (Altynsarin, 1957: 142). In "The Benefit of Curiosity", one of the characters is Peter the Great, and the other is a boy – the future artist. The boy paints a portrait of Tsar Peter – "Great is the fame that spreads about you, Tsar, throughout the whole land, and I wish to paint your face and keep it as a memory for my whole life" (Altynsarin, 1957: 158).

After Altynsarin's death in 1889, N.I. Il'minskij sought to honor the memory of the educator and his outstanding contribution to public education in the Turgai region by publishing a book entitled "Memoirs of I.A. Altynsarin" (Il'minskij, 1891: 396). To this end, he approached V.V. Katarinsky, as well as teachers from Russian-Kazakh schools in the Turgai region, requesting that they send him any preserved letters from Altynsarin for inclusion in the collection. In addition to the addressees, Altynsarin's widow, Aigany, also consented to the publication of his letters. The book was published in Kazan in 1891.

Thus, Ibrai Altynsarin formed an original model of historical education, integrating the ideas of Russian pedagogy into the national context of Kazakhstan. His system of educational institutions and methodological principles became the foundation of secular education for Kazakhs in the 19th century. Based on the pedagogical ideas of his intellectual predecessors, he developed the first Kazakh textbooks and initiated the transition of the Kazakh language to Russian Cyrillic script, considering this an important step towards the modernization of Kazakh writing. The influence of Russian pedagogy, adapted to the everyday and cultural characteristics of the Kazakh people, is clearly visible in the methodological manuals. Altynsarin actively introduced secular education, opening many different types of schools: two-year central Russian-Kazakh schools, volost primary schools, boarding schools for girls.

In Altynsarin's schools, small libraries were necessarily created and didactic principles of education were used – humanism and enlightenment, aimed ultimately at acquiring historical subjectivity for the Kazakh people. Altynsarin considered the school to be the “mainspring of education” for the Kazakhs, and it was largely thanks to him that the development of a national intelligentsia began in the Kazakh steppe in the following decades – the creation of a layer of educated Kazakhs capable of serving as a bridge between traditional culture and modernization.

Altynsarin also relied on the socio-pedagogical movement of Russian culture in the 1860s and sought modernization through the education of a citizen capable of thinking critically and acting in the interests of society.

Altynsarin's model combined the Russian pedagogical heritage and Kazakh realities. He postulated the integration of the native language and culture with progressive Western Russian traditions. The basis of his concept was popular secular and practice-oriented education. Thanks to this model, the first network of national education was created, which formed the basis for the development of the intelligentsia of Kazakhstan and further cultural development. Ibray Altynsarin, inspired by the organic synthesis of ideas of Russian pedagogical science and the national culture of the Kazakhs, created a unique model of historical education. His methodological base, network of institutions, multilingual learning environment and emphasis on the practical and moral aspects of education formed the core of national secular education. The Russian education system, with its didactic methods, textbooks, structure and principles, gave Altynsarin the necessary tools, which he successfully adapted for the education of the masses in the conditions of the Kazakh steppe society.

Thus, Ibray Altynsarin was one of the key architects of historical and cultural education in Kazakh society in the 19th century. His influence extended far beyond the sphere of educational activity: he played a pivotal role in reinterpreting the historical memory of the Kazakh people, laying the foundations for a new form of national consciousness rooted in education, morality, and cultural continuity. Altynsarin introduced elements of historical self-awareness into educational practice, transforming the Kazakh school from a mere place of literacy into a space of cultural transmission.

Abai Kunanbayev (1845–1904) was not only a poet and philosopher, but also a historiosopher whose ideas had a profound impact on the rethinking of Kazakh historical memory amid the crisis of traditional society at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. His reflections on the fate of the people, the degradation of moral values, and the need for spiritual awakening laid the foundation for a new narrative of the past – one in which the history of the people is understood not as a heroic chronicle, but as a path to self-knowledge and moral responsibility.

At the core of Abai's philosophy lies the idea of inner self-cultivation as the historical mission of the people. For Abai, historical memory is not a mere glorification of ancestors, but a critical rethinking of the mistakes and weaknesses of the past (Kodar, 1997: 75). He contrasted genuine historicity – rooted in reflection and morality – with the routine adherence to customs. His historiosophy dismantled the cyclical worldview of the steppe tradition, in which history was perceived as the repetition of ancestral feats. Instead, he proposed a linear model – a path of development through self-criticism and knowledge. The formation of Abai's critical historical perspective was profoundly influenced by his acquaintance with the works of Russian writers and thinkers of the 19th century. Through translations and dialogue with the enlightened Kazakh milieu, he deeply absorbed the ideas of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Krylov, as well as the philosophical views of Belinsky, Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky. He not only adapted them to the Kazakh worldview, but also discovered in them intellectual tools for transforming public consciousness. At the same time, Abai's ideas did not emerge in a vacuum: the 19th century marked a turning point – the formation of the Kazakh intelligentsia as an independent historical force. “In his mature years, Abai sought to promote knowledge, science, and enlightenment through his works, yet he encountered difficulties, finding little understanding among the majority of the people. However, his closest circle embraced his ideas, and many of his followers would become participants in the nationwide Alash movement in the early 20th century” (Dalayeva, 2020: 191). It was during this period that Kazakh representatives became not only objects, but also subjects of cultural, political, and scientific initiatives. The emergence of such figures as Chokan Valikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin, Shakarim Kudaiberdiyev, Alikhan Bukeikhanov, Magzhan Zhumabayev, and many others testified to the birth of a new class of intellectuals who perceived their people not as part of the tribal world, but as part of world history. A vivid example of cultural convergence in Abai's creative work is manifested in his adaptation of the image and plot of Alexander the Great. His literary legacy includes the poems “Iskander”, “Masgut”, and “Azim”, which contributed significantly to the development of the lyric-epic genre in Kazakh literature (Asipov, 1984: 202–203).

The great Kazakh poet and educator Abai Kunanbayev studied in Semipalatinsk, attending the madrasa of Imam Akhmet-Riza while also taking classes at a Russian school. By 1862, Abai was already composing poetry. The Russian revolutionary-democratic movement and Russian literature would play the same role in his life as they did in that of Chokan Valikhanov. In 1869, Evgeny Mikhaelis – having served his exile in Pudozh and Tara after Petrozavodsk – arrived in Semipalatinsk, where he began studying Kazakh life and, beyond the Irtysh steppe, discovered a poetic talent. He would go on assisting in Abai's self-education (Strelkova, 1983: 250).

Abai's principal contribution to the narratives examined in this article was the philosophical reflection on and ethical reevaluation of historical memory. Summarizing his role in the process under consideration, the following may be noted: in Abai's works, tradition underwent critical reinterpretation. He did not merely reproduce historical memory, but subjected it to deep critical analysis. He condemned certain archaic vestiges of traditional society, calling for the abandonment of outdated customs and envisioning a future for his people inseparable from the broader course of humanity. In his "Words of Edification", Abai frequently turned to folk wisdom, proverbs, and sayings, yet imbued them with a new and profound philosophical meaning. From the past, he drew lessons for the moral perfection of the individual and the formation of a new ethical code: Abai proposed a synthesis of Islamic values, folk ethics, and enlightenment humanism. His ideal of the "complete human" (*tolyq adam*) rested on a reinterpreted and purified cultural memory, oriented towards self-improvement.

In the pantheon of historical memory of Kazakhstan, this role continues to this day to be played by the poet and philosopher Abai Kunanbayev. His influence on Kazakh culture and the tradition of written literature of subsequent generations is colossal. However, despite the monumentality of his memorial status, Abai continues to excite minds and provoke discussions. Of particular interest is the theme of Abai's understanding of the economic and cultural way of life of the Kazakhs, sedentarism and the prospects for active agriculture, which, according to the poet, is necessary for the historical perspective of the people in the future.

Abai Kunanbayev's historiosophy is not just a philosophical reflection on the fate of the Kazakh people, but also a deeply personal attempt to comprehend the vector of development of the steppe culture in an era of rapid change. Living at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Abai found himself at a unique point of historical intersection: on the one hand, he saw the rapid introduction of colonial practices of the Russian Empire, on the other, he realized the need for internal modernization of Kazakh society, including through labor, education and familiarization with universal cultural values. One of the central themes in Abai's reflections is active labor in spite of natural and climatic conditions as the basis for the spiritual and social revival of the people. In this context, agriculture acts not just as a type of economic activity, but as a metaphor for the transition to active agriculture. For Abai, this is not a forced introduction of an alien practice, but an organic opportunity to escape from stagnation and gain historical subjectivity in the conditions of modernization of the 20th century. Abai saw agriculture as a way to cultivate a new type of thinking in people – conscious, disciplined and focused on the future. His idea of work is closely linked to the ideas of the European Enlightenment, but passes through the prism of his own cultural tradition. In this sense, he did not so much contrast traditional nomadic culture with the new way of life, as he strove for a synthesis in which the best elements of Kazakh identity could be preserved and developed in new historical conditions.

This is where his attitude to the Russian intellectual tradition comes into play, recognizing its value as a tool with which Kazakhs can reach a higher level of consciousness and join the universal cultural tradition.

The idea of equality of peoples occupies a special place in his thoughts. Abai was far from nationalism in its ethnocentric form. He strove for the Kazakhs to become an equal part of a large empire not through self-denial, but through the development of internal potential. He believed that only an educated, hardworking and morally mature person can be recognized as equal in a multinational society. Therefore, education, moral improvement through history lessons and the acquisition of historical subjectivity became links in one chain for him – the process of acquiring subjectivity within the empire.

Thus, Abai's historiosophy is a unique synthesis: it unites the cultural code of a nomadic people, the educational ideas of European modernism and a critical understanding of the imperial project. Agriculture in this coordinate system is not just an agricultural practice, but a symbol of transformation.

Abai did not idealize either nomadic archaism or the state order. His reflections are an attempt to find a point of growth for his people in the conditions of historical turbulence. He realized that the Kazakh world was on the verge of a civilizational choice, and sought to give his people the tools for a conscious acquisition of historical subjectivity. It is here that we see the deep connection between the culture of agriculture and the imperial educational project in its historiosophy. Agriculture as a model of settled labor and social stability, and education as a way to reveal human potential. Together, they form the foundation for a new consciousness capable of not only adapting to the realities of the coming century, but also transforming them from within over time.

For Abai, the comprehension of the past and self-criticism were essential for overcoming stagnation and advancing towards progress. He regarded renewed memory as the foundation for the revival and formation of a new, more refined Kazakh society – one that would attain historical agency within the framework of the modernization of the Russian Empire.

In the biographies of all three Kazakh enlighteners, the broader cultural context of Kazakh society in the 19th and early 20th centuries is vividly reflected. Kazakhs began to participate in the work of imperial institutions – schools, gymnasiums, and scientific societies. From the 1860s onward, they published in the Russian-language press, sent letters to the tsarist administration, and advocated for their native lands (for example, in cases concerning land redistribution and legal proceedings). By the 1880–1890s, a stable network of educated individuals, literate and active in both languages, had begun to emerge in the Kazakh steppe. All of this points to the formation of historical agency, that is, the capacity of the people for reflection and deliberate action within the framework of the new sociocultural and political reality.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the formation of a national intelligentsia engaged in dialogue and in a process of cultural and intellectual exchange with prominent representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, all three Kazakh enlighteners – despite differences in their methods (science, education, philosophy) – sought to preserve, reinterpret, and develop the cultural memory of the Kazakh people as the foundation of its identity and future. Their works laid the groundwork for the further development of Kazakh thought, becoming the starting point for the formation of national consciousness and statehood in the 20th century.

The ideas of Valikhanov, Altynsarin and Abai remain relevant, since they underscore the importance of continuous dialogue with the past in determining future paths development. In the research and reflections of all three representatives of the national intelligentsia, historical memory also serves a prognostic function. The interpretation of the past becomes the scientific basis for envisioning the future and defining the trajectories of development for a Kazakh society united by knowledge of its history and oriented towards the horizon of historical memory.

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