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The Semipalatinsk Interior District: Authority, Collaboration with Local Elites, and Imperial Practices in the 19th century

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Abstract

This article examines the Semipalatinsk Interior District as a short-lived but important experiment in Russian imperial governance during the nineteenth century. Created in 1854 to administer Kazakhs living on the right bank of the Irtysh River, the district reflected the empire's effort to regulate a population with ambiguous legal status and to integrate them into a bureaucratic framework. Drawing on archival records from the Omsk Historical Archive and a range of historiography, the study reconstructs the district's establishment, administrative structure, and everyday practices of control.

The analysis shows how imperial authorities limited the role of traditional elites, introduced new procedures for elections, and reshaped the *biy* courts into hybrid institutions combining local custom with imperial law. Measures such as oaths of allegiance, ticket systems, and collective responsibility reveal how the empire sought to discipline mobility and transform social life. The district also illustrates broader strategies of social engineering, where loyalty and wealth replaced hereditary legitimacy.

By situating the Semipalatinsk Interior District in a comparative perspective, the study highlights common features of nineteenth-century imperial governance and contributes to understanding how empires managed peripheral populations through authority, collaboration, and adaptation.

Keywords: Semipalatinsk Interior District, Russian Empire, Kazakh elites, Imperial governance, colonial intermediaries, administrative reforms, legal transformation, mobility control.

1. Introduction

The Semipalatinsk Interior District was established as a distinct administrative unit to govern the Kazakhs who roamed the right bank of the Irtysh River. Its creation reflected the empire's desire to organize the administration of the "internal" Kazakhs, who occupied an ambiguous legal status (PSZRI, 1855: 493).

Despite the significance of this initiative, the district had a short lifespan. During the administrative reforms of 1867–1868, it was abolished and incorporated into the Semipalatinsk Region. This brief experiment demonstrates that the Interior District functioned as a transitional and experimental institution, designed to test new forms of governance and to integrate the Kazakh population into the empire's bureaucratic system.

In historiography, attention has often focused on the external districts and broader reforms, while the Interior District remains understudied. Yet its experience offers a new perspective on the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. Key mechanisms of imperial governance were evident here: the limitation of traditional elite authority, the introduction of new procedures for selection, and the transformation of the *biy* courts.

The relevance of this study lies in viewing the Semipalatinsk Interior District as an imperial governance project. Such an approach allows for the identification of specific features of the power system, the examination of methods of collaboration with the local elite, and the placement of this experience within the global context

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of analogous 19th century administrative institutions. Similar projects existed in Austria-Hungary, British India, Qing China, and the Ottoman Empire, where special structures were likewise created to manage peripheral populations.

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to examine the Semipalatinsk Interior District as an imperial governance project, to reveal its system of authority, to analyze methods of engagement with the Kazakh elite, and to situate its experience within the broader framework of nineteenth-century global practices of governing peripheral peoples.

2. Materials and methods

For the purposes of this study, archival documents from the Historical Archive of the Omsk Region (Omsk, Russian Federation) were extensively utilized. Of particular importance was Collection No. 3, "Office of the Omsk Governor-General", which preserves information on administrative reforms, correspondence between officials, and practical measures for governing the Semipalatinsk Interior District. These sources enabled the reconstruction of the district's formation process and the identification of specific features of imperial policy toward the Kazakh population.

In addition, published works by pre-revolutionary scholars, Soviet historians, and contemporary Kazakh authors were employed. Their inclusion allowed for a comparative assessment of different stages in historiography and demonstrated the evolution of scholarly approaches. This combination of archival materials and historiographical analysis provided the study with both coherence and depth.

The research also applied methodological approaches that framed the formation of the Semipalatinsk Interior District specifically within the context of imperial policy. The primary method was comparative-historical analysis, which facilitated the juxtaposition of Russian administrative practices on the periphery with analogous systems in global history. Comparative analysis was further employed in examining French prefectures, colonial districts, and administrative structures of the Qing Empire, revealing common features of imperial strategies.

An additional critical element was the application of contemporary theories of imperialism, which allowed the administrative reforms to be interpreted as part of a broader colonial policy framework. This approach enabled not only the reconstruction of factual developments but also the situating of these processes within the wider context of global patterns of imperial governance and modernization.

3. Discussion

Pre-revolutionary historiography on the Semipalatinsk Inner District developed within the broader framework of studies on the history of Siberia and the Kazakh steppe. No independent analysis of the district's establishment was undertaken. Scholars focused primarily on ethnographic and geographical data, which were viewed as the basis for administrative decisions. Chokan Valikhanov collected extensive material on Kazakh life and the specific features of local governance; his observations became an important source for understanding imperial policy (Valikhanov, 1984).

Travellers and members of the Russian intelligentsia, such as Grigory Potanin and Pyotr Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, recorded ethnographic and geographical information that made it possible to grasp the distinctiveness of the region and its economic characteristics (Potanin, 1884; Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, 1914). Aleksei Levshin and Dmitry Zavalishin described the social and economic conditions of the steppe, providing a foundation for later administrative reforms (Levshin, 1996; Zavalishin, 1862). Taken together, these works show that pre-revolutionary historiography viewed the Inner District as part of a broader process of incorporating and developing the region.

Military officials and administrators such as Bronevsky, Krasovsky, and Venyukov focused on the delineation of the *zhuz* boundaries, the development of agriculture, and questions of military geography (Bronevsky, 1836; Krasovsky, 1868; Venyukov, 1873). The journalist and ethnographer Konshin added to this picture with ethnographic sketches and administrative notes based on his observations in the Semipalatinsk region (Konshin, 1901). Taken together, pre-revolutionary historiography produced a fragmented yet valuable understanding of the Semipalatinsk Inner District as an element of imperial policy, in which ethnographic and geographical data served as the foundation for administrative decision-making.

In Soviet historiography, the Semipalatinsk Inner District was not treated as an independent subject but rather as part of the broader policy of the Russian Empire toward the Kazakh population. Scholars focused primarily on social and economic transformations and on the integration of the steppe into the imperial system. Ye.B. Bekmakhanov offered a detailed analysis of Kazakhstan's incorporation into Russia, demonstrating how imperial policy shaped the region's development (Bekmakhanov, 1951). N.Ye. Bekmakhanova and D.I. Dulatova examined administrative measures and their impact on Kazakh society (Bekmakhanova, Dulatova, 1974). S.Z. Zimanov focused on the legal dimensions of governance (Zimanov, 1960), while N.Ye. Masanov explored social structures and economic change, linking these processes to imperial policy (Masanov, 1984).

In the historiography of independent Kazakhstan, the topic of the Semipalatinsk Inner District has been reconsidered within the broader context of the region's political and social transformations. Contemporary scholars pay particular attention to the dynamics of administrative divisions, ethnic composition, and economic

processes. The works of B.M. Abdrakhmanova, T.T. Dalayeva, and G.S. Sultangalieva examine the region as part of wider changes in imperial policy and their impact on Kazakh society (Abdrakhmanova, 1998; Dalayeva, 2019; Sultangalieva, 2014). Particular importance is attached to the work of Zh.K. Kassymbayev, who highlighted the role of the city of Semipalatinsk as a center of administrative and cultural transformations at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Kassymbaev, 1998). An important contribution was also made by Z. Kabuldinov, who emphasized administrative reforms in the internal provinces and their influence on the socio-economic structure of Kazakh society (Kabuldinov, 2011). Modern historiography thus considers the Inner District as a dynamic element of imperial policy, linking it to broader processes of modernization and regional transformation.

Thus, the historiography of the Semipalatinsk Inner District reflects three major trends. In the pre-revolutionary period, scholars focused primarily on ethnographic and descriptive material; in the Soviet era, attention shifted toward the region's socio-economic development and its integration into the imperial system; and in independent Kazakhstan, researchers have examined the district within the broader context of colonial policy and modernization. Each stage expanded the scope of inquiry and introduced new analytical perspectives. At the same time, the question of how the district was originally formed remains insufficiently explored and requires further, comprehensive study in the context of imperial policy and the transformation of Kazakh society.

4. Results

In the main part of the article, the topic will be examined across three interconnected sections. The first section focuses on the preconditions and circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Semipalatinsk Inner District, as well as the significance of its creation for the administrative system of the Russian Empire. It is important here to show why the district was deemed necessary and what functions it was expected to fulfil.

The second section analyses the practices of imperial control over the Kazakh population of the district. Particular attention is given to how imperial authorities regulated their mobility, economic activities, and legal status by means of bureaucratic and military-police mechanisms. This section reveals the distinctive features of the imperial approach to governing peripheral populations.

The third section places the Semipalatinsk Inner District in a comparative context. Its experience is juxtaposed with similar administrative institutions in other nineteenth-century empires, allowing for the identification of both common patterns and specific features of the Russian model of governance.

Such a structure ensures a holistic understanding of the topic and makes it possible to present the Inner District as an element of imperial strategy comparable to global practices of managing peripheral peoples.

Origins and Preconditions of the Semipalatinsk Inner District

In the first half of the 19th century, the process of Kazakh settlement within the internal provinces of Russia, including Western Siberia, continued despite various prohibitions and restrictions imposed by regional authorities. According to the 1851 census, 18,985 Kazakhs of both genders were living in the Semipalatinsk District of the Tomsk Governorate alone (Keppen, 1857: 259). These groups, referred to as “internal”, roamed along the right bank of the Irtysh River, while the “external” Kazakhs lived beyond the Irtysh line of military fortifications.

The absence of a unified administrative structure for the “internal” Kazakhs led to significant disorder: they were simultaneously subordinate to *zemstvo*, Cossack, and Cabinet authorities, which further worsened their social and legal position. Additional contributing factors included the spread of horse theft, abuses by local officials, and repeated petitions from Kazakh elders requesting the establishment of official administrative bodies.

The impossibility of removing the “internal” Kazakhs to the steppe forced the authorities to seek an alternative solution. As a result, on 19 May 1854, the “*Highest Approved Regulation on the Administration of the Semipalatinsk Region*” was issued, which provided for the creation of a special district for the Kazakhs who roamed along the right bank of the Irtysh (PSZRI, 1855: 493). The new Semipalatinsk Inner District was separated from the Tomsk Governorate and incorporated into the Semipalatinsk Oblast, receiving the status of an independent administrative unit.

Following the adoption of the Regulation on the Administration of the Semipalatinsk Region, the authorities of the Russian Empire took steps to institutionalize the new district. One of the first measures was bringing the “internal” Kazakhs to take an oath of allegiance: an act that carried not only legal but also symbolic meaning. For more than half a century, they had lacked their own administrative structures, and now the empire sought to formalize their integration into the new system of governance.

On 8 August 1854, P.M. Spiridonov, who had been appointed head of the future district administration, gathered representatives of the Kazakh population in the *Podpusknaya stanitsa* at the order of the governor-general of Western Siberia. They were informed of the emperor's “most gracious consent” to establish the long-requested Inner District, after which the administrative regulations were read aloud, translated into Tatar to ensure clearer understanding (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 3. D. 3571. L. 129ob.).

According to P.M. Spiridonov's report, the Kazakhs received the announcement with reverence, offered a prayer according to their custom, and expressed their willingness to remain “loyal sons of the

Russian fatherland” (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 3. D. 3571. L. 129ob.). In terms of modern theories of imperial governance, this act can be understood as a ritual of incorporating a peripheral population into the imperial space. The oath functioned as a symbolic contract: it both formalized the loyalty of the subjects and simultaneously demonstrated the state’s concern for the “new” governed population.

Thus, the oath became part of a common practice in nineteenth-century empires. Symbolic acts, such as pledges, ceremonies, and public readings of laws, served to legitimize authority. They also helped integrate peripheral societies into the administrative system.

The district administration, the main governing body of the Semipalatinsk Inner District, began functioning on 1 January 1855. Until then, *zemstvo* officials handled legal cases on their own. They focused especially on cases of horse theft. This shows the empire’s desire to avoid a legal vacuum. It also demonstrates the effort to maintain control over the mobile population (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 3. D. 3571. L. 211-212).

Imperial Mechanisms of Control over the Kazakhs of the District

The legal status of the “internal” Kazakhs was defined as “nomadic Siberian aliens”. This status granted certain privileges. For example, they were exempt from military conscription. At the same time, it excluded them from participation in *zemstvo* duties (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 3. D. 3571. L. 212). Thus, the empire created a special legal regime. It distinguished the Kazakhs from other categories of the population. It also allowed the authorities to govern them through separate mechanisms.

The Charter on the Siberian Kirghiz served as the basis for administration. However, it was modified to suit the specifics of the Inner District. In terms of modern theories of imperial governance, this can be seen as an example of “legal engineering”. The empire used existing norms but adapted them for a particular region. This created a hybrid system of authority.

The district administration of the Semipalatinsk Inner District had a special structure. It was headed by a district military chief, who also acted as the chair. A senior sultan served as deputy. Three Russian officials and only one Kazakh representative acted as members (PSZRI, 1855: 500). This arrangement clearly minimized the role of the Kazakh elite, including descendants of Genghis Khan. In contrast, in the external districts, their participation was more visible. This was due both to the district’s geographic location, surrounded by the Irtysh Cossack line and settlement villages, and to the broader imperial policy. The empire sought to gradually limit the power of the traditional elite.

This institutional model became part of a broader practice of marginalizing hereditary dynasties. Descendants of Genghis Khan, who had governed *uluses*, *zhuz*, and khanates since the 13th century, gradually lost real levers of power. It is noteworthy that as early as 1834, the most influential sultans and elders petitioned the Omsk regional governor. They requested the creation of a special body on the internal side, called *the Steppe Duma*. They proposed that it should consist of the main ancestor and two or three members elected by the Kyrgyz community (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 1112. L. 61ob.). However, this initiative was rejected. It reflects the empire’s strategy of centralizing power and refusing to recognize autonomous institutions.

Thus, the Semipalatinsk Inner District became a space where the empire implemented a strategy of administrative asymmetry. The local elite retained symbolic participation but lost real influence. This is a typical example of nineteenth-century imperial practice: traditional power institutions were replaced by bureaucratic structures. This ensured central control and reduced the risk of political autonomy in the periphery.

In addition, the creation of the Semipalatinsk Inner District involved the gradual displacement of the traditional Kazakh elite from governance. The Genghisid descendants, who had played a key role in managing *uluses*, *zhuz*, and khanates since the 13th century, saw their political influence deliberately limited. This reflected the empire’s strategy of substituting hereditary institutions of power with bureaucratic structures, where military chiefs and officials held the decisive authority.

Administratively, the structure of the Semipalatinsk Inner District formally followed the model of the external Kazakh districts. The territory was divided into *volosts*, and *volosts* into *auls*. An *aul* typically included 50–70 yurts, while a *volost* comprised 10–12 *auls* (Istoriya gosudarstva..., 1982: 106-107). *Volosts* were governed by sultans or respected Kazakhs. However, within this similarity lay an important distinction. The empire gradually changed the content of power. The role of Genghisid descendants was reduced, while representatives of the “black bone” gained influence.

The electoral system in the Semipalatinsk Inner District had special features. *Aul* elders and *volost* administrators were elected for an indefinite term and confirmed by the district administration or the frontier commander. The senior sultan and Kazakh member were elected for three years and appointed with the approval of the governor-general. Only sultans, administrators, and Kazakhs who had received ranks or awards could participate in elections (PSZRI, 1855: 501).

Crucially, the new senior sultan assumed office without the traditional ceremony of being raised on a *white koshma*. Skipping this symbolic act broke the old forms of legitimizing authority. It also demonstrated the empire’s policy of institutionalizing governance, where sacred practices were replaced by bureaucratic procedures.

The powers of *aul* elders and *volost* administrators were not limited by term (PSZRI, 1855: 501). The lack of a mechanism for their removal increased the dependence of lower-level officials on imperial authorities. This reveals the paradox of the electoral system: the procedure for election formally remained, but in practice it reinforced the subordination of local administrators to the district chief, a Russian officer.

Thus, the electoral system in the Semipalatinsk Inner District was not a democratic mechanism. It was an instrument of imperial policy. The system combined elements of formal autonomy with real centralization of power. Elections in the district were more a form of apparent participation than genuine self-governance. They legitimized imperial authority rather than the interests of the local society.

It is also known that the imperial authorities appointed figures such as Tokpan Aytuarly, a man of non-sultan lineage who actively cooperated with the authorities during the population census (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 3. D. 3571. L. 229), and Tuyte Nurekenuly, a wealthy livestock owner who was also not a Genghisid (IAOO. F. 3. Op. 3. D. 3710. L. 114ob.), as senior sultans in the district. This clearly shows that the empire deliberately carried out social engineering. Power was not passed to hereditary dynasties, but to new leaders whose legitimacy rested on wealth, administrative loyalty, and support from the center. This gradually blurred traditional social boundaries in Kazakh society. Descendants of Genghis Khan lost their exclusive right to power. At the same time, new social groups gained the opportunity to occupy key positions.

It is important to note that the context of events here is significant. In 1847, the rebellion of Kenesary Kassymuly, the last major Genghisid who claimed the khanate, was suppressed (Kassymbaev, 2002: 174-175). This rebellion marked a turning point. After it, the empire accelerated the development of laws aimed at eliminating the political influence of sultans and the khan's dynasty. The Inner District became a space where this policy was particularly evident. Appointing senior sultans from the "black bone" placed them in opposition to traditional sultans and clan elders. This created a new power configuration based on loyalty to the empire rather than hereditary legitimacy.

It is also important to note that judicial authority in the Inner District was a special hybrid. Formally, the institution of *biy* courts was preserved. However, it incorporated elements of the Russian imperial court, including juries. Such an experiment did not exist in the external Kazakh districts. It reflected the empire's desire to test new forms of control in the "internal" territory.

Jury *biys* were elected from each *volost*, and the chief *biy* was appointed from the most respected clan leaders. The appointment was confirmed by the district administration. This showed the gradual subordination of the traditional court to bureaucratic procedures. The judicial process remained outwardly familiar. The jury *biy* presided, while two others represented the parties in conflict (PSZRI, 1855: 501). However, the possibility of a single *biy* making a decision with the parties' consent, and the right of the district administration to review decisions with other *biys*, demonstrated that ultimate authority rested with imperial structures.

This judicial system can be seen as a transitional institution. It preserved the form of the traditional court but changed its content. In terms of historical anthropology, it is an example of legal syncretism. Kazakh legal norms intertwined with imperial procedures, creating an eclectic system. Over time, this system prepared for the displacement of local tradition.

From the perspective of colonial governance theory, this practice was a form of legal acculturation. The empire could not immediately abolish the *biy* courts, as they were deeply rooted in Kazakh society. Instead, it used a strategy of gradual transformation. The tradition remained as a shell, but new rules were introduced inside, changing the very logic of the court.

In the end, judicial authority in the Inner District became an instrument of institutional transformation. The empire simultaneously demonstrated respect for local customs and subordinated them to its legal system. This was a step toward creating a unified legal space, in which Kazakh law was meant to be absorbed into the imperial framework.

The legal status of the Kazakhs in the Semipalatinsk Inner District was strictly regulated. It differed from the situation of residents in external districts and those temporarily roaming in the lands of Tomsk and Tobolsk Governorates. They were forbidden to move onto peasant villages' lands. They also could not freely travel between districts. Violating these rules led to detention and forced return. In addition, staying in the Cossack zone was only allowed after paying a repair fee, which was used to support the troops (Kassymbaev, 1998: 129-130). Thus, the Kazakh population was under constant control of the Cossack units, which performed both military and administrative functions.

From the perspective of imperial governance, this can be seen as a strategy of limited inclusion. The Kazakhs were recognized as subjects, but their mobility and access to resources were strictly regulated. The empire used legal barriers and economic mechanisms to integrate them into the system of power while keeping them dependent. The Cossack troops became a tool not only for defense but also for surveillance. Rental payments became a form of economic subordination.

Modern approaches allow this practice to be interpreted through the concept of imperial biopolitics. The authorities regulated movement, access to land, and resources, turning the population into an object of governance. The approach of colonial acculturation also applies. The traditional mobility of the Kazakhs was restricted, and their economic activity was subordinated to the interests of the empire.

Thus, the legal status of the Kazakhs in the Inner District was not just a legal distinction. It was part of the empire's strategy. Through control of mobility and economic payments, the empire ensured dependence. It also gradually transformed traditional ways of life, preparing them for integration into the bureaucratic system.

The legal status of the Kazakhs in the Semipalatinsk Inner District was strictly regulated through a passport or ticket system. It limited the ability to roam outside the district and made movement a controlled procedure. Without a ticket, no other district could admit the Kazakhs. Reuse of tickets was prohibited (PSZRI, 1855: 502). Thus, mobility, which had traditionally been central to the Kazakh way of life, was placed under bureaucratic control.

From the imperial perspective, the ticket system served several functions. First, it was a tool for taxation. Tickets generated income and strengthened the financial base of the local administration and military structures. Second, it ensured discipline and dependence. The Kazakhs were under the supervision of local authorities, and violations could lead to the loss of the right to further movement. Third, the system reinforced imperial control over space, turning the territory into a strictly delineated and monitored zone.

The Regulation on the Establishment of the District for the Administration of the Inner Siberian Kyrgyz detailed the rules for Kazakhs staying in Cossack stanitsas and peasant villages. Special tickets were required to leave the district. Tickets varied by duration and were issued by different officials. An aul elder could issue a ticket for one week. A volost administrator could issue a ticket for one month and up to 250 versts from the camp. Longer trips required permission from the district administration. Tickets recorded the person's name, age, distinguishing features, reasons for migration, and travel period. These details were also entered into special border administration books. Kazakhs noted for "bad behavior" were not allowed to receive tickets. Residents of Cossack stanitsas and peasant villages were obliged to hand over Kazakhs with expired tickets to the authorities. Violations incurred fines. If the offender could not pay, the amount was distributed across the community (PSZRI, 1855: 503).

Analyzing these regulations, it can be said that the ticket system was a tool of imperial governance. It restricted the traditional mobility of the Kazakhs and turned it into a bureaucratic procedure. From the perspective of imperial biopolitics, the authorities controlled population movement, recorded personal data, and regulated access to space. This allowed the empire to govern not only the territory but also the way of life of the nomads. The introduction of collective responsibility strengthened discipline and involved local communities in the system of surveillance.

Thus, the ticket system was not just a technical measure. It became part of the empire's strategy, where control over mobility and strict regulation of movement served to integrate the Kazakhs into the bureaucratic structure while simultaneously limiting their traditional practices.

In this situation, the authorities of the Semipalatinsk Inner District applied a strict system to control Kazakh movement. At gatherings, residents of stanitsas and villages were informed about the allowed duration of nomads' stay. If a Kazakh was found with an expired ticket or without one, both the local authorities and the nomad were punished. Local officials could face penalties at the discretion of their superiors, while the nomads were fined. These measures were milder than in the Orenburg administration, where similar violations could result in exile, corporal punishment, or conscription into the army (OGA00. F. 6. Op. 10. D. 1260. L. 1-10b.). Later, the procedure for issuing tickets was changed several times, as the authorities sought to prevent arbitrariness by aul and volost administrations. All these measures aimed to keep the Kazakhs within the district and prevent their movement into other internal and external districts. Despite the prohibitions, some Kazakh elites continued to migrate outside the district, showing the limited effectiveness of these measures.

From an analytical perspective, the ticket system and accompanying punishments were part of the empire's governance strategy. They combined control over mobility with discipline of local communities. The approach of imperial biopolitics applies here: the authorities recorded movement, regulated the duration of stay, and used punishments to maintain order. At the same time, collective responsibility was practiced, as local residents could be fined for the "overstay" of Kazakhs. This increased local participation in surveillance and made control a shared obligation.

Thus, the measures implemented in the Semipalatinsk Inner District reflected a typical 19th-century imperial policy: restricting freedom of movement and gradually transforming traditional ways of life. These measures were milder than in other regions but still served to integrate the Kazakhs into the bureaucratic system and strengthen imperial authority over the peripheral population.

Comparative Analysis: The Place of the District in the Global Practices of 19th-Century Empires

In the context of imperial policy, it is especially important to draw parallels between the Semipalatinsk Inner District and similar institutions in other 19th-century states. Such comparison allows us to view the governance of peripheral populations from a broader perspective. It is not only a local experience of the Russian Empire but also part of a global imperial practice. Through comparison, it becomes clear that such structures were key elements of imperial strategy. Their analysis opens new opportunities for understanding mechanisms of power and the durability of empires.

Of particular interest is the comparison of the Semipalatinsk Inner District with the princely states of British India. In both cases, imperial authorities relied on the local elite and used it to govern the population. Common features included the limitation of autonomy, taxation, and control over movement.

Differences appeared in the degree of independence. Indian princely states maintained a formal state status and enjoyed more symbolic freedom. In the Semipalatinsk District, autonomy was reduced to a

minimum, and it was fully integrated into the Russian bureaucratic system. In India, a policy of subsidiary alliances required princes to maintain British troops. In the Semipalatinsk District, control was exercised by Cossack units and the district administration. Thus, the Russian model was closer to direct governance, while the British model relied on indirect rule. In India, princes formally retained power but were effectively subordinate to imperial interests (Bayly, 1999: 112-115).

In addition, Austria-Hungary in the 19th century used similar methods to govern its borderlands through the creation of special administrative units. In Austria-Hungary, this was evident in Galicia, Bukovina, and Transylvania. Special districts were established with enhanced bureaucratic supervision, separate tax regimes, and legal norms different from the general state law. The Semipalatinsk Inner District served a similar function. It acted as a tool to integrate peripheral territories into the imperial system, combining bureaucratic administration with military control.

Common features included the use of administrative fragmentation as a means of maintaining power and adapting governance to local conditions. In both cases, the special status of the districts allowed the center to flexibly regulate taxation, legal norms, and administrative procedures. This created a system where the periphery remained under constant control but had specific local rules (Judson, 2016: 145-150; Kann, 1974: 312-318).

The Semipalatinsk Inner District can also be compared, to some extent, with the millet system of the Ottoman Empire. In the 19th century, the Ottomans used this administrative system to govern religious communities. Each group had the right to manage personal law, education, and religious practices. The empire retained supreme control but delegated certain powers to local leaders (Stamatopoulos, 2006: 253-273).

The Semipalatinsk Inner District in the Russian Empire had similar features. A special administrative form was created, where the local elite participated in governance but remained under strict central supervision. In both cases, the empires sought stability by combining limited autonomy with control. The millets offered more cultural freedom, while the Russian model was more bureaucratic and military. However, the underlying logic was the same: special structures served as instruments to integrate the periphery and maintain order.

In the Qing Empire, there was a system called tuzjun, which was used to govern border populations. It was similar to the better-known tusi system inherited from the Ming dynasty. The essence of the system was that local hereditary leaders retained authority over their communities but recognized the supremacy of the emperor. They carried out administrative and military functions on behalf of the central government. This arrangement allowed the empire to maintain control over complex and distant territories without direct intervention. At the same time, it secured the loyalty of local elites (Li, 2015: 87-92).

The Semipalatinsk Inner District in the Russian Empire had similar elements. A special administrative structure was created, where the local elite participated in governance but remained under strict supervision of the bureaucracy and military. The common feature was that both empires used special mechanisms to govern borderlands. They combined limited autonomy with supreme control to integrate the periphery into the imperial system and maintain stability (Bayly, 1999: 112-115).

Thus, Qing China and the Russian Empire applied different forms, but the logic was the same: special governance structures served as tools to maintain authority over border populations.

Of particular interest is the comparison of the Semipalatinsk Inner District with the prefecture system established by France in the 19th century. This system was used to govern both the metropolis and colonial districts in North Africa. In Algeria, after 1830, prefectures were introduced where appointed officials controlled administrative and financial affairs. In Tunisia and Morocco, French authorities also created districts that combined local structures with direct control from Paris. The main goal was to consolidate authority and organize governance of new territories (Julien, 1970: 215-220).

This practice shared common features with other imperial systems. Like in the Russian Empire or the Ottoman Empire, the French administration sought to create special forms of governance for peripheral regions. In all cases, bureaucracy, taxation, and control over local elites were employed. The French model differed in its emphasis on direct intervention and assimilation policies, but the underlying logic was similar. Special districts served as instruments to integrate the periphery into the imperial system and maintain stability (Ageron, 1991: 134-138).

Thus, the prefectures and colonial districts of France in North Africa can be compared to the Semipalatinsk Inner District and other imperial practices. The common feature was the creation of special administrative units that allowed the center to maintain authority and adapt governance to the specific conditions of each region. This confirms that different empires used similar mechanisms to control their peripheries (Bayly, 1999: 112-115).

In conclusion, comparing the Semipalatinsk Inner District with analogous institutions in other 19th-century empires reveals the general logic of imperial governance. In all cases, special administrative structures combined limited autonomy for local elites with supreme central control. These mechanisms served as tools for integrating peripheral territories into the imperial system and ensuring stability. Therefore, the Semipalatinsk Inner District appears not only as a local phenomenon of the Russian Empire but also as part of a global practice of maintaining power over borderlands.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Semipalatinsk Inner District was established as a special administrative unit reflecting the Russian Empire's effort to organize the governance of Kazakhs, who were in a complex legal situation. Its creation was part of the broader imperial strategy to integrate peripheral peoples into the bureaucratic system.

Historiography shows that attention to this district remained limited for a long time. Pre-revolutionary authors focused mainly on ethnographic and geographic data. Soviet scholars treated the district as part of the empire's general policy, linking it to socio-economic changes. Contemporary Kazakh historians emphasize colonial policies and modernization processes.

Archival documents, especially materials from the "Chancellery of the Omsk Governor-General" fonds, made it possible to reconstruct actual mechanisms of governance. They reveal how the empire limited the power of the traditional elite and introduced new forms of control.

Comparative analysis shows similarities between the Russian model and the practices of other 19th-century empires. In all cases, special administrative structures combined participation of local elites with supreme central control.

Thus, the Semipalatinsk Inner District appears as part of the global practice of imperial governance. Its experience helps to understand mechanisms of power, methods of controlling the periphery, and the resilience of empires.

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