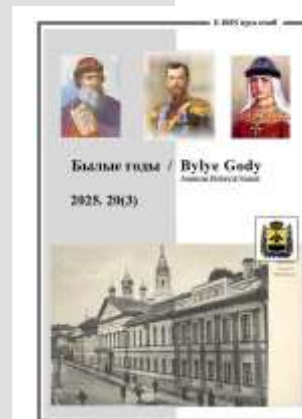


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## Reform of 1868: Activities of the West Siberian and Orenburg Administrations on Colonisation of the Kazakh Steppe

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### Abstract

This study examines the administrative-colonial reforms that institutionalised Russian rule in Kazakhstan during the 1867–1868 “Provisional Regulations”, which declared all Kazakh lands state property and enabled accelerated confiscation of fertile steppe territory for peasant resettlement. Drawing on newly retrieved archival records and pre-revolutionary press, we reconstruct the policymaking and field practices of the West Siberian and Orenburg Governor-Generalships, the bodies responsible for directing military colonisation and supervising migration flows. We trace the creation of a province-level hierarchy comprising governor-generalships, districts, volosts and aul administrations, designed primarily to meet imperial military needs, while simultaneously facilitating agrarian colonisation. Analysis shows how these administrations orchestrated cadastral surveys, issued land-grant charters to immigrant communities and compelled Kazakh pastoralists to relocate, undermining nomadic grazing cycles and fragmenting customary land tenure. The rapid influx of Russian and Ukrainian peasants, coupled with fiscal burdens and grazing restrictions, precipitated a deep structural crisis in the Kazakh economy, eroding traditional social relations and accelerating socioeconomic stratification. The article demonstrates that colonial regulatory measures not only dispossessed Kazakh households but also entrenched patterns of inequality and ecological stress across the steppe. Our findings refine understandings of imperial tsarist frontier governance and its enduring impact on Central Asian rural development.

**Keywords:** administrative reform, “Provisional Provision”, governor-general's office, region, uyezd, volost, aul, colonial policy, resettlement.

### 1. Introduction

The relevance of the topic examined in this study lies in its contribution to understanding key aspects of the colonisation of Kazakhstan by the Russian Empire. As a result of this process, the territories traditionally inhabited by Kazakhs lost their independence and were incorporated into the administrative structures of the Turkestan, Orenburg, and West Siberian governor-generalships. In this context, all power was concentrated in the hands of the governors-general.

For the Russian Empire, the primary objective was to subjugate these territories and integrate them into its political system, a goal it pursued vigorously. Accordingly, the significance of this study is also connected with its capacity to reveal the explicitly colonial nature of Russian imperial policy during this historical period.

The aim of the study is to analyse the activities of the West Siberian and Orenburg governor-generalships in managing the colonisation of Kazakh-inhabited territories, carried out under the 1868 reform. The scientific novelty of the research lies in its comprehensive examination of the historical and

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political processes of the era and in identifying the central role of the West Siberian and Orenburg governors-general as key agents in the implementation of Russian colonial policy.

## 2. Materials and methods

This study is a descriptive and qualitative investigation that employs the historical-systemic and problem-chronological methods. During the research process, both archival document analysis and content analysis were conducted. Of particular interest are studies devoted to this issue, undertaken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among them, the following works may be noted: *Kirgizy* by A. Bukeykhanov (Bukeykhanov, 1895), *Skotovodstvo v Turgaiskoy oblasti* by A.I. Dobrosmyslov (Dobrosmyslov, 1895), and the study published in Saint Petersburg in 1900 entitled *Kolonizatsiya Sibiri v svyazi s obshchim pereselencheskim voprosom* (Kolonizatsiya..., 1900). Also included are the works of A.I. Maksheyev (Maksheyev, 1890) and *Obshchiy vzglyad na ustroystvo russkikh poseleniy v severo-vostochnoy chasti kirgizskoy stepi* (Obshchiy..., 1869).

Additional sources of importance include *The Colonisation of the Steppe Regions* by V.A. Ostafyev (Ostafyev, 1895), *Outline of the Work of the Turgai-Ural Resettlement Organisation* (Ocherk..., 1911), and the *Memorial Book and Address Calendar of the Ural Region for the Year 1897* (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897). Also studied were *Russia: A Complete Geographical Description of Our Motherland* (Rossiya..., 1903) and *Rural Administration: Russian and Indigenous* (Selskoe..., 1910), which served as core sources. During the research, periodical scientific publications from the mid and late nineteenth century were also consulted. These included *Aktyubinskiy Gorodskoy Vestnik* (Aktyubinskiy...), *Vostochnoye Obozreniye* (Vostochnoye..., 1882), *Zapiski Orenburgskogo Otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* (Zapiski..., 1868), *Russkoye Bogatstvo* (Ocherk..., 1894), and *Turgayskaya Gazeta* (Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1897; Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1903; Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1910). Periodicals from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were also utilised, including *Akikat* and *Egemen Qazaqstan*. The issue of agrarian colonisation of the Steppe Region has been the subject of ongoing academic discourse since the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, particularly in the context of the development of the Trans-Ural steppe territories. This theme has also been reflected in the works of representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia (Abselemov, 2019: 60).

Memoirs also serve as valuable sources, offering detailed descriptions of these events and preserving significant archival material. The primary archival collections used in this study were those of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Almaty, Kazakhstan) and the United State Archive of the Orenburg Region (Orenburg, Russian Federation).

Among the memoir-based sources consulted are the works of Anichkov (Anichkov, 1889), Veselovskiy (Veselovskiy, 1897), Gaines (Gaines, 1897–1898), and Kaufman (Kaufman, 1904). The selection of all sources for this study was based on criteria of scholarly neutrality, with preference given to archival materials for their reliability and relevance.

Distorted and ideologically biased materials were excluded from the research. During the information retrieval process, the following keywords and search queries were used: “colonisation of the Kazakh steppe”, “administrative reform of 1868”, and “Orenburg Governor-Generalship”, among others. Sources that lacked concrete data on the resettlement process, the 1868 reform, or the activities of the governor-generals were excluded. Preference was given to sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as to contemporary academic publications from the past five years that contain relevant data on the activities of the Orenburg and West Siberian administrations (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Selection of Sources for the Content Analysis of the Administrative Reform of 1868 in the Orenburg Governor-General's Office

Found	Excluded	Retained for analysis
110	61	49

In the course of the study, content analysis, the comparative historical method, and empirical approaches such as the interpretation of archival records, statistical data, and memoirs were applied. The empirical base of the study comprises archival documents, nineteenth-century newspaper publications, official reports from governor-generals, and administrative records.

Based on the analysis of the identified materials, the study concludes that the administrative reforms had a colonial character and resulted in numerous negative consequences for the Kazakh population. The study does not use personal data that would compromise anonymity. It does not infringe upon the rights or dignity of historical figures. All archival materials are publicly accessible for verification and are cited with precise archival references. The research is limited to the nineteenth century and is based primarily on Russian-language sources. In some cases, data reflecting the perspective of the Kazakh side are absent. It should be noted that there are alternative interpretations of the events, especially from the viewpoint of the colonising authorities. The object of this study is the process of colonisation of Kazakh lands by the Russian

Empire. The subject of the study is the 1868 reform and the activities of the West Siberian and Orenburg administrations in the colonisation of the Kazakh steppe.

In the process of source selection, chronological and territorial sampling was primarily applied. The research objective is to examine the role of the 1868 reforms in the colonisation of Kazakh lands.

A wide range of general scientific and specialised historical methods was employed in the course of the study. The analytical method (Nurgaliyeva et al., 2022: 77) was applied to divide the research problem into its constituent parts.

This approach enabled a detailed study of specific aspects of the colonial policy pursued by the Russian Empire. The method of synthesis contributed to the holistic consideration of the issue. This methodological combination is commonly used in humanities-focused academic research.

Among the historical methods, the historical-systemic approach played a central role. It allowed for an analysis of the historical processes as part of an integrated system in which each element is interconnected and contributes to the structure as a whole. The problem-chronological method was also applied, which made it possible to trace developments in the military-political situation of the region and to identify key stages of this process.

Other methods included the library research method, which entailed the study of academic literature by various authors relevant to the topic under investigation. Given that a significant portion of the sources used in this study comprises archival materials, several methods of archival science were also employed. These included the systematic approach, which was applied in the analysis of archival documents, legal acts, and cartographic sources.

### 3. Results

As for the study of this problem, this complex and multifaceted issue in the history of Kazakhstan has been repeatedly addressed by Kazakh, Russian, and Western scholars. Among the key works are those by M.Zh. Abdirov (Abdirov, 2000), I.V. Anisimova (Anisimova, 2022; Anisimova, 2023), I.B. Bektaeva (Bektaeva, 2025), D.V. Vasiliev (Vasiliev, 2014), K. Kenzhebekov et al. (Kenzhebekov, 2015), M.S. Mukanov (Mukanov, 1991: 7), and T. Sedelnikov (Sedelnikov, 1991). The issue of the annexation of Kazakh lands to the Russian Empire is also discussed in the third volume of the academic edition History of the Kazakh SSR, from Ancient Times to the Present Day (Istoriia 3, 1979).

Among the studies published in the Kazakh language, the following works should be noted: D.K. Abenov (Abenov, 2020), B.S. Abenova (Abenova, 2019), S. Aymbetov (Aymbetov, 1992), and S. Smagulova (Smagulova, 2019).

Of particular interest are works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that directly address the topic. These include Kirgizy by A. Bukeikhanov (Bukeikhanov, 1895), Cattle Breeding in the Turgai Region by A.I. Dobrosmyslov (Dobrosmyslov, 1895), and the study Colonisation of Siberia in Connection with the General Resettlement Question, published in St Petersburg in 1900 (Kolonizatsiia..., 1900). Also relevant are works by A.I. Maksheev (Maksheev, 1890), A General View of the Arrangement of Russian Settlements in the North-Eastern Part of the Kirghiz Steppe (Obshchii..., 1869), V.A. Ostafiev's Colonisation of the Steppe Regions (Ostafiev, 1895), Sketch of the Work of the Turgai-Ural Resettlement Organisation (Ocherk..., 1911), Memorable Book and Address Calendar of the Ural Region for 1897 (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897), Russia: A Full Geographical Description of Our Fatherland (Rossiia..., 1903), and Rural Administration: Russian and Native (Selskoe..., 1910).

In the course of this study, periodical scientific publications from the mid and late nineteenth century were also consulted. These included Aktobe City Gazette (Aktobe...), Vostochnoe Obozrenie (Vostochnoe..., 1882), Notes of the Orenburg Division of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (Zapiski..., 1868), Russkoye Bogatstvo (Ocherk..., 1894), and Turgayskaya Gazeta (Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1897; Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1903; Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1910). Periodicals from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were also used, such as Akikat and Egemen Qazaqstan.

Issues related to agrarian colonisation of the Steppe Region were the subject of intense academic discussion as early as the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, particularly during the development of the Trans-Ural steppe territories. These debates were reflected in the writings of Kazakh intellectuals (Abselemov, 2019: 60).

In addition, numerous memoirs describing these events have been preserved, alongside a substantial body of archival materials. The primary archival collections used in this study were those of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Almaty) (TsGA RK) and the United State Archive of the Orenburg Region (Russian Federation) (OGAOR). Among the most notable memoirs are works by I. Anichkov (Anichkov, 1889), N. I. Veselovsky (Veselovsky, 1897), A. K. Gaines (Gaines, 1897–1898), and A.V. Kaufman (Kaufman, 1904).

During the Soviet period, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, historians of the Kazakh SSR also turned their attention to the study of these issues. Their research addressed various aspects of the resettlement movement to the Steppe Region in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Special focus was given to the evolutionary transformations within the nomadic system of economic organisation and nomadic society (Abselemov, 2019: 62).

***Imperial Policy and the Background to the 1868 Reform.*** The first half of the nineteenth century represents a turning point in the history of the Kazakh people. During this period, Kazakh statehood was finally dismantled through a combination of coercion and deception, and Kazakh lands became a colony of the Russian Empire ([Bektaeva, 2025: 22](#)).

The colonisation of Kazakh territories formally began around 1730, when influential elders of the Younger Juz instructed their ruler, Abulkhair Khan, to negotiate a military alliance with the Russian government. Contrary to the will of the council of elders, the khan authorised his ambassadors, Kutlymbet Koshtaev and Seytkul Koidagulov, to negotiate not an alliance but the subjugation of the Younger Juz to the Russian Empire.

The delegation sent by Abulkhair Khan was received by Empress Anna Ioannovna of Russia (reigned 1730–1740). On 19 February 1731, she signed a decree accepting the Younger Juz as a subject of the empire. Subsequently, a Russian embassy was dispatched to the Kazakh Khanate with the aim of securing official recognition of Russian sovereignty by the khan and his entourage.

However, the majority of Kazakh sultans and elders, upon learning the true nature of the agreement, expressed strong opposition to accepting any form of allegiance to Russia. This historical episode demonstrates that the negotiations conducted by the khan were made without the consent of the people and did not reflect their collective will or aspirations. Despite widespread public discontent, the process of administrative subordination of the Kazakhs to Russia continued. In 1740, Abylai Khan, leader of the Middle Juz, also became a subject of the Russian Empire. From that point forward, the Kazakhs lost the right to elect their own rulers, and all subsequent khans were appointed directly by the Russian government. By 1822, khanal authority had been entirely abolished across all Kazakh zhuzes, and the Kazakh people were effectively stripped of their independence and statehood.

Even before the major administrative reforms, the Russian authorities had begun constructing military fortifications deep within the Kazakh steppe as early as the 1820s. The interests of the indigenous population were completely disregarded. In the territories controlled by the Separate Siberian Corps, the tsarist government pursued an aggressive land appropriation policy ([Kenzhebekov et al., 2015: 39](#)).

On 13 June 1889, the Akmola region was officially designated as an area open to voluntary resettlement ([Ocherk..., 1894: 190](#)). As a result, the total land area allocated to the Siberian Cossack army reached five million dessiatinas. Only members of this army were permitted to fish in the Irtysh River and Lake Zaisan. The Cossacks received the most fertile and strategically advantageous lands in the Kazakh steppe.

Throughout the colonisation of Kazakh lands, punitive measures sanctioned by the tsarist autocracy were frequently employed. At the same time, the Russian Empire sought to impose a political system that disregarded the traditional structure and cultural specificities of Kazakh society. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russia had initiated a comprehensive policy aimed at the final subjugation of Kazakh-inhabited territories ([Bektaeva, 2025: 22](#)).

The Cossacks were the first to begin developing the Kazakh steppe. They seized the flood meadows in the valleys of the lower and middle reaches of the Ural River, traditionally used by the Kazakhs. From there, they expanded deeper into the interior of the region. Through a series of social privileges, tsarism transformed the Cossacks into the principal instrument of colonial policy. One by one, stanitsas and farmsteads were granted vast tracts of land taken from the local population and located along fertile river valleys. The Siberian Cossacks ultimately took possession of the most valuable plots.

In Kokchetav County, the Cossacks occupied the most fertile central and southern areas, which featured high-quality black soil, abundant water sources, valuable forests, a rich diversity of fauna, pine woods, and clean, healthy air. Several Cossack stanitsas were located in this region ([Abdirov, 2000: 202](#)).

In the Akmola uyezd, the Cossacks held territory between the Ishim and Tobol rivers, known for its fertile black soil and abundant meadow grasses. The left bank of the Irtysh River, which was part of the prohibited 10-verst strip (in some cases extended to 25–30 versts), included the richest floodplain meadows, while on the right bank the Cossacks controlled the Dolonsky, Karagaysky, and Shulbinsky pine forests.

In addition, local administrations organised Cossack settlements near steppe fortifications. For instance, in a letter dated 29 August 1825, the Governor of Western Siberia, P. M. Kaptsevich, proposed to the chief of the Omsk region the resettlement of Cossacks to the steppe fortifications, with the aim of establishing permanent stanitsas. The regional council approved the proposal, and the Siberian Committee drafted a specific Regulation on the Resettlement of Cossacks in the Steppe, which was formally adopted on 20 December 1826. Between 1826 and 1831, 78 Cossack families moved to the Kokchetavsky district and 34 families to the Karkaralinsky district.

In 1832, another 38 families from various regiments expressed their willingness to relocate to the districts of Ayaguz, Karkaraly, and Kokchetav ([Abdirov, 2000: 202](#)). By 1836, seven detachments comprising 860 Cossacks had been stationed at the steppe fortifications of the Siberian Cossack Army. By 1853, the number had increased to approximately 2,000, and by 1863, 20 detachments totalling 2,500 Cossacks were based in the steppe ([Abdirov, 2000: 202](#)).

As a result, the local Kazakh population was forced to rent their ancestral lands from the Cossacks. Fines were imposed by the ataman, amounting to 15 kopecks per sheep, 18 per head of cattle, 23 per horse,



and 38 per camel. Additionally, Cossack settlements charged four roubles from each Kazakh family that moved to what was now considered “their land”.

In this way, the Kazakh people were subjected to exploitation on two levels. First, they were deprived of their fertile lands and former abundance. Second, they were forced to pay regular fines for maintaining the traditional way of life that had sustained them for centuries. As a result, the customary rhythm of Kazakh life, sustained by the land of their ancestors, was severely disrupted. The loss of access to fertile land due to the expansion of Cossack settlements hindered the development of agricultural practices and inflicted serious damage on the traditional system of land use, especially that connected with animal husbandry.

It is noted that the Cossacks failed to develop an agricultural culture in the newly occupied territories. As Maksheev remarked, “a Cossack not only did not help the fortifications with grain, but also lived at the expense of the treasury” (Maksheev, 1890: 128). According to another observation, “the Cossacks, who immediately received the treasury provision for the whole family, did not even think of sowing bread” (Obshchii..., 1869: 97). The resettled Cossack population lost practical farming skills: they neither cultivated the land nor improved it, and in many cases, left it degraded. Surrounded by vast steppes and herds of horses, the Cossack did not consider enhancing the livestock breeds. As noted in archival documents, “wearing a Kirghiz's chapan, he did not even pay attention to the way it was sewn” (TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 6-7). These failures in colonisation and the inability to establish viable economic activity may also be attributed to differences in national mentality. Scholars have pointed out that national mentality is a specific set of communal traits that define the cultural orientation of an ethnic group (Yatsenko, 2022: 42).

Given that Russians and Kazakhs were historically shaped by different geographical and climatic conditions, with divergent mentalities, the resettled population likely faced significant difficulties adapting to unfamiliar environmental conditions and a foreign-language ethnic context. These challenges may have contributed to the broader failure of colonisation efforts.

Instead of contributing to the development of the region, the Cossacks engaged in the unchecked exploitation of its wealth and the systematic plundering of the Kazakh people. They frequently raided Kazakh lands and seized livestock. As A. K. Gaines observed, the privileges granted to the Cossacks did not promote prosperity but rather fostered idleness and economic disorder. He wrote that such conditions led to “the systematically organised robbery of the Kirghiz... By their robbery and all kinds of violence they have settled in the Kirghiz hostile feelings towards the entire Russian population” (Gaines, 1897: 116).

This pattern reveals the ignorance, laziness, and passivity of the Cossack settlers, who failed to value the land that had been so easily handed over to them. By 1846, the Siberian Cossack Army had grown to 48,000 men, including 6,000 stationed at steppe fortifications. By the 1860s, the territory of the Siberian Cossack Army amounted to 5 million dessiatinas. The Ural Cossack Army, consisting of 81,247 individuals, received 6,235,335 dessiatinas, while the Orenburg Cossack Army, with a total of 7,567 individuals, was granted 7,509,623 dessiatinas of fertile land and water-rich territories (Istoriia 3, 1979: 236). The government came to the conclusion that the only viable method of establishing a permanent Russian presence in the region was through free colonisation (TsGA RK. F. 4. Op. 1. D. 490. L. 45).

The construction of military fortifications and the establishment of Cossack settlements were merely the initial stages of the colonisation of Kazakh lands by the tsarist regime. The imperial authorities understood that the most reliable way to complete the colonisation process was to resettle as many Russian peasants as possible in the Kazakh steppe.

These developments provoked dissatisfaction among the Kazakh population (Prokhorov, 2024: 73) and contributed to one of the longest uprisings in the region's history.

The rebellion of 1837–1847, led by Kenesary Kasymov, was directed against both the Russian Empire and the Kokand Khanate and affected almost all Kazakh zhuzes. From the second half of the 1820s, Khan Kenesary resisted the methods of Russian administration introduced in 1824. After the death of his brother Sarzhan, he continued the resistance in the territory of the Middle Juz.

One of the earliest uprisings against Russian rule was the revolt of the Kazakhs of the Younger Juz, led by Syrym Datuly in 1783–1797. Its primary cause was a dzhut, or mass livestock death, during the winter of 1782–1783, which had devastating consequences. While dzhut had occurred earlier and was usually linked to natural causes, it was popularly believed to recur every twelve years. These events were often accompanied by famine and widespread epidemics.

The situation deteriorated further in the spring of 1783, when the Ural Cossacks stole approximately 4,000 horses from the Kazakhs. The causes and consequences of the dzhut are analysed in the work *Asharshylyq qasireti* by Svetlana Smagulova (Smagulova, 2019: 3).

It should also be noted that challenges in the development of agriculture continue in Kazakhstan today. The government pays considerable attention to supporting the agricultural sector through subsidies and credit programmes. However, the products of the industry often remain uncompetitive in the foreign market, while labour productivity and the material and technical capacity of enterprises frequently fail to meet modern standards (Buzaubayeva et al., 2023: 31–32). Nevertheless, the concept of dzhut remains part of historical memory rather than present-day reality.

In 1778, during one of the clashes with the Cossacks, the children of Syrym Datuly were killed. However, the principal causes of the uprising were the aggravation of land disputes, the prohibition imposed

by the tsarist authorities on nomads accessing the “inner side”, the infringement of the rights of elders, and widespread robbery and violence perpetrated against the population.

Some time later, between 1822 and 1824, a rebellion broke out under the leadership of Jolaman Tlenshiuly. It was followed in 1824–1825 by another revolt led by Gubaidulla, the last khan of the Middle Juz. In the subsequent year, Sultan Kaip-Gali Yesimuly led a rebellion that lasted for more than a decade and ran parallel to a full-scale uprising supported by Kazakhs from all three zhuzes, led by the grandson of Abylai Khan, Sultan Kenesary. This rebellion, previously analysed, was notable for its geographical scale, high level of organisation, and duration of armed resistance.

In 1836–1838, further uprisings took place under the leadership of Isatay Taymanuly and Makhambet Utemisuly in the Bukey (Inner) Horde and among the Kazakhs of the Younger Juz.

Later, in 1853–1857, Yeset Kotybaruly led a rebellion, and in 1856–1857, an uprising erupted under Zhankozha Nurmukhameduly in the Syr Darya region. After the initiation of administrative reforms, another rebellion occurred in 1870 on the Mangyshlak Peninsula under the leadership of Dosan Tazhiuly.

This sequence of events demonstrates that the period preceding the reforms was characterised by continuous uprisings of Kazakhs against Russian imperial policy. Importantly, the reforms did not put an end to resistance, and uprisings persisted in the post-reform period.

It should be noted that the reforms were not intended to improve the living conditions of the local population. Their primary aim was to strengthen the colonial control over Kazakh territories. The Commission responsible for drafting the 1868 reform stated that “when resolving the land issue, the government should take such a measure, which, on the one hand, would meet the modern requirements of the people, without violating their everyday life, and on the other hand would correspond to the benefits of Russia” (TsGA RK. F. 4. Op. 1. D. 490. L. 40). In practice, however, neither this requirement nor the stated goal was fulfilled. At the same time, the multi-volume work *History of the Kazakh SSR, from Ancient Times to the Present Day*, published during the Soviet period, portrayed the colonial policy of the Russian Empire as a positive development (Istoriia 3, 1979: 9), reflecting the ideological narrative of the time.

***West Siberian Administration and the Peculiarities of Colonisation.*** On 21 October 1868, the document entitled *Provisional Regulations on Administration in the Steppe Regions of the Orenburg and West Siberian Governor-General's Office* was officially approved. Today, it is considered one of the most important legal and administrative documents in the history of the Central Asian peripheries of the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century (Anisimova, 2023: 393).

In the records of the commission responsible for drafting the Provisional Regulations, the purpose of peasant resettlement on Kazakh lands is stated as follows: “for the spread of citizenship among the Kyrgyz, their rapprochement with the Russians and the development of productive and industrial forces of the country, it is impossible not to recognise useful and necessary to settle in the steppes of the Russian population, which, belonging to a superior race, will have a beneficial effect on the life of the people and prepare them for a full connection with Russia” (TsGA RK. F. 4. Op. 1. D. 490. L. 44). The true intentions of the tsarist government, however, were not the so-called “growth of citizenship” in the Kazakh steppe or the “improvement of living conditions”, but rather the consolidation of colonial control through the mass resettlement of Russian peasants onto Kazakh lands.

Later, the official for special assignments Makinsky in a letter that was addressed to the Steppe Governor-General openly says that for Russia the need for colonisation of Kazakh lands is due to the internal needs of the empire. Therefore, the problem of agrarian crisis that occurred after the reform of 1861 (abolition of serfdom), the tsarist administration intended to solve by resettlement of Russian peasants on the Kazakh land (TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 4230. L. 4).

As a result, the tsarist government “a small shortcoming” of its big policy decided to correct by seizing Kazakh lands. Undoubtedly, such resettlement would create conditions for the full development of the Kazakh region as a colony and closely link it with the central regions of the empire.

According to the provisions of the “Temporary Regulations”, the West Siberian Governor-Generalship comprised the Akmola and Semipalatinsk regions. The Akmola region consisted of districts from the Oblast of the Siberian Kirghiz, including Kokchetav and Akmola, territories from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and part of the 6th regimental districts of the Siberian Cossack Army, as well as the cities of Omsk and Petropavlovsk (article 6) (Materialy..., 1999: 155). The Semipalatinsk region encompassed the districts of Inner Semipalatinsk and Kokbektinsk, along with part of Sergiopolsky, Zaisan, Bayan-Aulsky, and Karkaralinsky districts, and the Cossack territories of the 6th, 7th, and 8th regimental districts of the Siberian Cossack Army, with the remaining part allocated for the formation of the Semirechenskaya Oblast (article 7) (Materialy..., 1999: 155). Each oblast was further subdivided into uyezds, volosts, and auls, reflecting the administrative organisation typical of the period.

The governor-general was considered the supreme authority of the colonial administration of the West Siberian region, followed by military governors at the head of oblasts and district governors appointed from above. Only tsarist officials, especially officers of noble descent or Cossacks, were appointed to all the highest posts of regional and district administration; military, police and prison institutions were entirely under their jurisdiction. All of them were vested with civil, military power. The district chiefs also had police and judicial power on the basis of sole authority.

Volosts and auls were governed by volost governors, aul headmen and people's judges, who were approved from above by the steppe colonial authorities. Volost governors, aul chiefs, as well as junior assistants of district chiefs, were formally elected and appointed from Kazakhs, which was aimed at finally weakening the political influence of the sultans.

The "Provision" describes the principle of creating volosts as follows: "volosts are made up, according to local conveniences, of auls, neighbouring in terms of land use of winter camps" (Article 60). "Transition of kibits from aul to aul, of the same or another volost, is allowed with the consent of kibit owners of those auls between which the transition takes place, and with the permission of the police authorities" (Article 61) ([Materialy..., 1999: 161](#)). This led to the elimination of administrative division of the region on the basis of belonging to one or another clan, and it was replaced by the territorial principle of administration. The reforms of territorial division and administration did not take into account the national specificity and way of life of Kazakh society, completely destroying any independence in the management. A similar system of administration was formed in the Orenburg region.

The justification for the "legality" of colonial measures is contained in Article 210 of the "Provisional Regulations", which stresses that "the lands occupied by the Kyrgyz nomads shall be recognised as state lands and shall be put to public use by the Kyrgyz" ([Materialy..., 1999: 176](#)). At the same time, Article 238 declared the forests growing on this territory to be state property ([Materialy..., 1999: 179](#)).

By solving the land issue in this way, the tsarist government intended to turn the Kazakh lands into an object of full colonisation and to strengthen its dominant position in the region on this basis. Thus, the declaration of all Kazakh lands as the property of the state created a legal basis for the further expansion of the seizure of the best fertile lands from the Kazakhs for their settlement by settler peasants. Special attention was paid to the formation of the taxation system and the establishment of tax authorities ([Kraft, 1898: 25](#)). The first settlers appeared in Akmola region under the Governor-General of Western Siberia N.G. Kaznakov (1875–1881) and military governor of Akmola region V.S. Tsytoich (1871–1882). 272 families of Russian peasants, who moved to Akmola region unauthorisedly, asked to settle them in the selected and occupied areas — Kresty and Gruzdy of Petropavlovsk uyezd. However, the military governor Lieutenant-General V.S. Tsytoich refused, motivating his refusal by the fact "that the settlers were announced about the appointment of 30 plots for settlement, but the peasants refused to settle in the appointed plots, finding them inconvenient for themselves." The 30 plots designed by the commission at the General Directorate of Western Siberia, intended for settlement of peasants, were located on the tract roads and "due to the lack of meadows and forest were not quite favourable" ([Ostafiev, 188: 10](#)). As recognised by the Steppe Governor-General in his report, "...unfortunately, in setting such an apparently correct system for determining sites for settlements, the administration acted without sufficient preliminary study of soil and climatic conditions of the areas allocated for settlers" ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. T. 1. L. 46ob.](#)). The administration was obviously misled by the relative ease of settlement of the Cossack element and the prosperity of some stanitsas, while overlooking the important circumstance that the Cossacks received the best land on both banks of the Irtysh — the only large river in the region — and near the few freshwater lakes. The Governor-General of the Steppe region, G.A. Kolpakovsky (1882–1889), claimed that "Akmola region cannot be settled by Russians, as there is absolutely no land suitable for culture and that, on the other hand, only the Kirghiz here... can adapt to local conditions" ([Ostafiev, 1885: 5](#)).

The colonisation of the steppe regions was officially suspended. Several regulations strictly prohibiting unauthorised resettlement were adopted. For example, the local administration expelled Russian peasants three times who had settled in Kokchetav uyezd in 1871 on the leased Kazakh lands in the Bakym-Choka tract. In the Russian settlement on Lake Kundunkulskoye, the huts and buildings were dismantled, and the property was moved to the nearest Cossack settlement. In Atbasar uyezd, the unauthorised peasants were arrested by the uyezd chief.

However, despite the administrative prohibitions, settler settlements did appear in the steppe. For example, during the provincial revision of Petropavlovsk uyezd in 1884, a Russian village of several dozen houses was discovered on the Musina tract, which had existed for more than ten years on the bank of the Ishim. The governor recognised this fact and named the village Yavlennaya. In Kokchetav and Petropavlovsk uyezds, the official of special orders Makinsky planned 11 settlements with settlement of 8500 men. And historical tracts Gruzdi, Dubrovo, Kresty, Musino by the end of 80th years were given to peasants under settlement and 3 settlements with the population of 2403 male souls were formed and they conquered 40186 dessiatinas of land.

In Akmola region, 30 plots designed by the administration for peasant settlements were cut for settling from 40 to 110 male souls each with an allotment of 30 dessiatinas per male soul. However, from 1876 to 1884 only 18 plots were occupied by settlers, including 11 plots in Kokchetav uyezd and 7 plots in Atbasar uyezd. In them 900 male souls were settled, and 3871 souls of both sexes. As it is indicated in the "All-Report on the most important measures for the improvement of the steppe region", "...the remaining 12 plots, although they were repeatedly offered to settlers, remain uninhabited due to particularly unfavourable conditions of the area, lack of land, poor quality of land, lack of water, etc." ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. 1-volume, L. 47](#)).



Therefore, “the settlers began to work at the factories of Akmola and Petropavlovsk counties, soaking there in the winter months; with the onset of spring, in need of seeds for crops, the settlers appealed to the administration with requests for loans and allowances” (TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. T. 1. L. 47). In this regard, since 1880, the settlers were given money loans over 26,000 rubles for each male revision soul.

They were also “granted: a) the right, in order to ensure the success of colonisation, to search for plots of land themselves; b) all settlers who arrived in the steppe were granted relief from taxes and in-kind duties, except for military duties, for 10 years, if the settlers, within 2 years, would acquire buildings and settle down. For the initial furnishing: 1) free of charge 100 roots per yard and 20 rubles for furnishing; 2) for farming tools and acquisition of livestock 20 rubles per family irrevocably” (Ostafiev, 1885: 13).

Thus, the permission and granting of privileges by the government for colonisation of the region gave Russian settlers the right to apply for the arrangement and allotment of Kazakh lands.

**Orenburg Administration: Peculiarities of Colonisation.** Orenburg Governor-General N.A. Kryzhanovsky said in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Orenburg branch of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society in 1868: “...despite the sad situation of the Kyrgyz steppe in terms of future civilisation, its possession for Russia is not only useful, but, in many respects, absolutely necessary; if at this moment it did not belong to us, then, for very many reasons, and much more economic than political, we would be forced to take possession of it” (Zapiski..., 1868: 21).

In saying this, he openly expressed his personal views on the colonisation of Kazakh lands and the colonial ambitions of Russian capitalism, which sought support in integrating the Kazakh region into the all-Russian economic system in order to exploit the immense wealth of the steppe region without hindrance—particularly the fertile lands, which began to be taken away from the Kazakhs and handed over to peasant settlers from Russia. Earlier, in 1835, the lands from Orsk to Troitsk (New Frontier Line – Auth.) were allocated to the Orenburg Cossack Army (Kraft, 1898: 169-171). Thus, a single decree stripped the Kazakhs, in broad daylight, of 4,313,000 dessiatins of land (Akiat, 1999). This is merely one typical example of land seizure from the Kazakhs in the Orenburg district by the Russian administration.

Subsequently, in 1849, Orenburg Governor-General Obruchev began settling family members of lower-ranked Orenburg Cossacks near military fortifications, granting them various privileges. During this period, Cossack settlements appeared: 18 families in Novopetrovsky Fortification, 26 in Raimsky Fortification, 10 in Orenburg Fortification, 10 in Ural Fortification, and 4 in Karabutak Fortification (Maksheev, 1890: 128). These settlements occupied the most fertile lands in the region, receiving adequate hayfields, forest areas, and arable plots.

According to the “Provisional Provision”, the Orenburg Governor-General's Office comprised the Ural and Turgai Oblasts. Articles 3–4 state that “the Ural region is made up of the lands of the Ural Cossack Army, the western part and a small space of the middle part of the Oblast of the Orenburg Kirghiz; the Turgai region is formed from the eastern part and the rest of the space of the middle part of the Oblast of the Orenburg Kirghiz” (Materialy..., 1999: 154). During this period, the Turgai region was officially closed to resettlement, but in reality, the local colonial administration actively supported the settlement of incoming Russian peasants in the area. The military governor, Major-General A. P. Protsenko, repeatedly (on 28 February 1885 and 14 February 1886) raised with the Ministry of Internal Affairs the issue of “the possibility and necessity of colonisation of the Turgai region”. He stated: “From the point of view of national interests, it is impossible to leave without Russian colonisation the huge space separating the Orenburg region from Turkestan. Therefore, in order to connect our possessions in Central Asia with the internal regions of the Empire, it is necessary in the Turgai region to create, in the direction of Turkestan, a chain of Russian agricultural settlements” (Moshchensky, 1914: 2).

The resettlement of Russian peasants to the western regions of Kazakhstan began after the Ural and Turgai Oblasts were formed. Russian peasants were drawn by rumours of “a prosperous life” and “rich and fertile lands” in the Aktobe and Kustanai regions (Kraft, 1900: 205). In the autumn of 1878, nine peasant families moved from the Voronezh province to Aktobe, and in 1880, forty more families arrived (Turgaiskaia gazeta, 1910). The number of settlers grew from year to year. By 1886, the number of settlers in Aktobe uyezd had reached 177 people (Rossiya..., 1903: 163).

The following year, the wintering grounds of several Kazakh families who owned lush meadows at the confluence of the Ilel and Kargaly rivers were destroyed, and they were forced to resettle towards the Dambar River. The administration “favoured” the Kazakhs by paying them only 35 rubles for each destroyed wintering site. As a result, the territory near the Aktobe fortification, to which Russian peasants relocated, expanded from 8,900 to 27,101 desyatinas (Aktobe..., 1914: 3).

Forced to submit to colonial power and “thanks” to the assistance of collaborators from among their own people, Kazakhs mourned their ancestral lands, being increasingly driven into the barren steppe. In this way, the Kazakh people were turned into strangers in their own homeland. The events of those years are described in the book by T. Shonanuly, Zher tagdyry – el tagdyry (Shonanuly, 1995: 5).

The process of resettlement was most intensively carried out in Nikolaevsky Uyezd, which was considered the most fertile area in the north of Turgai Oblast. The first steps in this direction were closely connected with the beginning of the construction of the city of Kustanai. The site chosen for laying the foundations of the city was the Kustanai tract, located 7–8 kilometres from the northern bank of the Tobol



River (OGA00. F. 6. Op. 10. D. 8570. L. 1), as a stream of running water flowed nearby, the river valley was covered with lush flood meadows, and the site was rich in flat and layered stone deposits required for construction. "Legends" about this "free" city reached even the European part of Russia. Thousands of peasants, in search of "free, ownerless lands", began to arrive and settle on Kustanai land.

The previously mentioned Governor-General N. Kryzhanovsky, despite the fact that the "Provisional Statute" did not permit the establishment of Russian settlements in places other than district centres, began appropriating Kazakh pasture lands and winter huts in order to resettle Russian peasants. On 19 December 1879, he proposed obtaining "the consent of the Kyrgyz communities owning these territories, and in advance to ensure the prevention of clashes that may arise between the Kyrgyz and settlers" (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 3476. L. 28). The actions of the administration, which aimed to seize the lands of 71 families located on the right bank of the Tobol River and belonging to the Arakaragai district, provoked resistance from the Kazakhs. However, under pressure from the authorities, an agreement was signed on 17 June 1881 stating that both banks of the Tobol River were "voluntarily" ceded for the construction of the city and the resettlement of Russians (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 3476. L. 69).

Of the 13,300 dessiatinas of land, thus taken away from the Kazakhs for the location of the district centre on the Kustanai land, 10,300 dessiatinas the administration allocated to the settlement of settlers. It was planned to resettle in this settlement 1,000 peasants, giving each land allotment of 10 dessiatinas (OGA00. F. 10. Op. 6. D. 17. L. 8-9). However, there were much more people willing to move to the new city. If from 1 January 1878 to 1 January 1879 they received 1,481 applications, then by the end of 1880 another 4,800 applications were accepted (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 3476. L. 38).

The first settlers arrived in Kustanai in the second half of 1880 and built 26 dwelling houses by winter (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 3510. L. 158). Those who did not have time to settle down lived in dugouts, caves dug in steep cliffs or ravines. In June 1881, more than a thousand peasants settled in the place of the future town. In 1885, the number of settlers in Kustanai reached 8,000, and they received 41,865 dessiatinas of land (OGA00. F. 10. Op. 6. D. 17. L. 9). This was not enough for the settlers, so they were not satisfied with what they received, and they took more and more land from the Kazakhs and built new settlements. Thus, two new settlements appeared: Prigorodny and Zatobolsky.

The fertile lands of Ilets'k and Nikolaev counties, which were inhabited by Russian peasants, were formerly summer pastures on which the cattle of the Kazakhs not only of the other two counties of the Turgai province but also of the neighbouring Syr Darya and Ural provinces walked. Therefore, the alienation of the huge mass of Kazakhs inhabiting the three provinces from the best lands in the named counties led their economy to decline. "Fearing" the aggravation of the situation, the Turgai administration tried to refuse to create conditions for Russian peasants but could no longer stop the flow of settlers.

Despite the refusal of the administration to accept them, the peasants squatted in Nikolaevsky uyezd. Having rented the land of Kazakhs, they built their houses and outbuildings on this territory. The number of Russian settlements increased due to the incessant arrival of tenants. As stated in one of the pre-revolutionary sources, "at first the settler is in the power of the owner of the land – Kirghiz and patiently endures everyday inconveniences, theft of livestock, trampling of crops, trying to live amicably with the Kirghiz, however, when instead of one or two houses there is a farmstead or settlement, the settler takes power in his own hands" (Ocherk..., 1911: 2). In this way, Russian peasants gradually became masters of the Kazakh land. The basis for this was the 220th article of the "Provisional Provision", which secured the right of Kazakh societies or individuals to lease their land to Russian peasants (Materialy..., 1999: 178). The Special Commission created by order of the Military Ministry in 1865 made a decision to transfer the left bank of the Ural into the possession of the Cossacks, ordering to leave 12,065 Kazakh households, which previously owned this bank, a total of 24,948 dessiatinas of hayfield land with scanty vegetation (Suleimenov, 1963: 253). Thus, each Kazakh family received only 2 dessiatinas of land. Governor-General Kryzhanovsky fully approved the commission's decision.

Due to the fact that the Department of Economy of the State Council at the meetings of 28 March, 29 May and 21 November 1870 confirmed the correctness of the decision to transfer the left bank of the Urals into the full perpetual ownership of the Cossack army, on 28 March 1871, Alexander II approved and signed it (Kolonizatsiia... 1900: 353-354). According to the Decree, all lands on the left coast of the Urals, starting from the mouth of the Ilek River and up to the place where the Urals flows into the Caspian Sea, were transferred to the Ural Mounted Cossack Troops for perpetual use. Thus, the Kazakh land with lush pastures, forest lands and abundant water sources, stretching 633 kilometres in length and 10 kilometres in width, the total area of which was more than 600,000 dessiatinas (Suleimenov, 1963: 59), became the property of the Cossacks. According to archival data, in 1873 the Ural Cossack Troops had 2,857,294 dessiatins of 1,000 sazhen in Ural uyezd, 2,922,102 dessiatins of 600 sazhen in Kalmyk uyezd, 679,395 dessiatins of 117 sazhen in Guryev uyezd, a total of 6,458,791 dessiatins of 1,717 sazhen of Kazakh land (OGA00. F. 6. Op. 17. D. 208. L. 64). In general, in 1860–1917, Cossacks owned 85.9% of 8,228.6 hectares of land seized from Kazakhs (Ayimbetov, 1992: 4).

The Tsarist administration did everything to transfer all lands in the area of the New Frontier Line to the ownership of the Cossacks. A special committee headed by Kryzhanovsky proposed to transfer all the lands covering the mentioned area to the Orenburg Cossack army, and the Cossacks, deprived of their native

lands, to resettle in a “deserted”, arid region covering from 760 thousand to 1 million dessiatinas of land. By decree of 23 May 1878, Alexander II approved the committee's decision ([Kolonizatsiia..., 1900: 399](#)). As noted by General Lukoshkov, chairman of the commission established in 1881 to consider the situation and develop a project for the accommodation of the Kazakhs of the Turgai region, “to meet the needs associated with the development of the cattle-breeding economy of the Kirghiz, huge territories are needed. They are not enough even now — used 2 million 600 thousand of land, in addition, all allocated 1 million dessiatinas of land is unsuitable for haying, and the best lands suitable for use are in the centre of the district and the direction of the Urals, but it is forbidden to let the Kirghiz to go there” ([TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 3. D. 85. L. 32-35](#)). Thus, the Orenburg Cossacks, taking advantage of the right of universal resettlement in the area of the New Line, chose the best lands and settled on them. The territories allocated by the project to the Cossacks, which were part of the 1,000,000 dessiatinas appanage, were bare, stony, semi-desert land.

**Steppe Governorate-General (1882–1918).** The Steppe Governor-General's Office was founded by a personal decree of the Highest, given to the Governing Senate on 18 (30) May 1882, as part of the Akmola, Semipalatinsk and Semirechensk regions (in 1899, it was returned to the Turkestan Governor-General's Office).

The Governor-General's Office was established on the initiative of the Minister of War P.S. Vannovsky as it became necessary to unite the territories of the Russian Empire bordering China in one governorship. After that, the West Siberian Governor-General's Office was abolished, and the Akmola and Semipalatinsk regions were transferred to the Steppe Governor-General's Office. The Orenburg Governor-General's Office was also completely abolished, and the Urals and Turgai regions were included in the Steppe Territory.

In the early 90s, the unauthorised resettlement of peasants in the Akmola region reached large proportions; in Atbasar, Kokchetav, and Petropavlovsk districts, there were up to 9000 male souls. For their arrangement and study of free lands in 1891, the governor-general of the Steppe region, Baron M.A. Taube, suspended resettlement to the Steppe regions. But during the work of the Akmola resettlement party, it was allowed again.

If to specify by regions, the Akmola region formed 131 villages with a population of 51,584 male souls, including Omsk uyezd – 23, Petropavlovsk – 38, Kokchetav – 37, Atbasar – 13, Akmola – 20 ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. T. 2. L. 318ob.-319](#)). In Semipalatinsk oblast, the question about the possibility of colonisation was answered negatively. According to the collected data, “only in Ust-Kamenogorsk uyezd and Zaisan tributary, in mountainous areas, irrigated by the sources of rivers, it is possible to allow colonisation on a limited scale. However, even such colonisation is unlikely to be successful, as farming here is possible only with artificial irrigation, which is little known to Russian peasants.” Nevertheless, from 1887 to 1895, Semipalatinsk region was organised into 17 villages with a population of 4,183 male souls, including, in Ust-Kamenogorsk uyezd – 9, Semipalatinsk – 8 villages ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. T. 2. L. 319](#)). The Semirechenskaya oblast was initially settled exclusively by Cossacks of the Siberian Cossack Troops (23,000 souls), but due to the significant expenditures of the treasury for the establishment of Cossack settlements, settlement by peasant settlers began in 1867. When choosing places for settlements, the necessity of connecting the existing Cossack and urban settlements in the region with intermediate settlements was considered. Thus, from 1867 to 1893, the Semirechensk region formed 31 villages with a population of 16,179 male souls, including Vernensky uyezd – 6, Pishpek – 9, Kapalsky – 2, Lepsinsky – 8, Przhivalsky – 6 villages ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. T. 2. L. 319ob.](#)).

Governor-General Taube, citing the significant difficulties encountered in settling peasants in the regions of the Steppe Governor-General due to the lack of available land plots, submitted a petition to the Emperor in 1896 with the following proposals. First, he requested that a portion of land be allocated from the ten verst wide neutral strip that had been established in the previous century along the line of Cossack settlements. This strip was originally intended to deter raids by the Kirghiz and was later temporarily transferred to the Siberian Cossack Army. Taube proposed that part of this land be retained for the army reserve, while the remainder, approximately 1,150,000 dessiatinas, be returned to the State Property Administration for redistribution among peasant settlers. That land held in the army reserve be leased from the army on a long-term basis at an increased rate and transferred to peasants. The area designated for this purpose was approximately 250,000 dessiatinas. That highly fertile land plots, previously granted by supreme authority as hereditary property to certain officers and officials, also be leased on a long-term basis and made available for temporary use by peasants. There were 507 such plots, with a total area of 580,000 dessiatinas ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. L. 311-312ob.](#)).

The Minister of Internal Affairs, in a letter marked “Confidentially” (No. 512, dated 19 July 1897), informed the Governor-General that the Emperor had rejected the petition. In his own handwriting, the Emperor wrote: “I cannot agree with this, the lands of the troops should remain forever troops” ([TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. L. 325ob.](#)). Thus, the 10-verst-wide strip of land along the banks of the Irtysh River, featuring the most fertile floodplains, was permanently retained by the Siberian Cossack Army.

Major-General Verevkin, the military governor of the Ural region, expressed his opinion on 23 August 1875 regarding the Regulations “On Colonisation of the Kirghiz Steppe” issued by the Council of the Main Administration of Western Siberia. He stated that there were virtually no good or convenient lands left in the steppe, even “for the needs of the Kirghiz themselves”, and that their wintering grounds along the linear

fortifications were so numerous that “the Kirghiz themselves were constrained in pastures and hayfields. All this annually gives rise to new quarrels and litigations for land, which often turn into quarrels and fights” (OGA00. F. 6. Op. 10. D. 8467/1. L. 16-17). On this basis, he opposed the implementation of the provisions in the region under his command.

Nevertheless, the military governor noted that the organisation of settlements near the fortifications was possible, with land allocated for housing, gardens, and grazing (OGA00. F. 6. Op. 10. D. 8467/1. L. 17). As a result, those wishing to resettle in the Ural region typically applied for placement near these fortified areas. The first such application was received in 1880 from the family of a peasant from Voronezh province, who requested to be settled in the Karakamys tract (Temirskoye Fortification) (Abenov, 2020: 243).

Beginning in 1884, the number of applications submitted to the Regional Directorate by peasants from the internal provinces of the empire began to increase. In total, between 1884 and 1891, 2,299 applications for relocation to the Ural region were received (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 178).

The governor-general, who was “convinced of the necessity and unconditional usefulness of organising Russian settlements”, approved the placement of those wishing to settle in the vicinity of fortifications and towns. Thus, between 1884 and 1891, the applications of the aforementioned 2,299 families who wished to move to the Ural region were fully granted. Of these, 25 families settled on the shore of Shalkar Lake, 120 in the valley of the Khobda River, 140 in Zhympitinskaya Volost, 158 in Chingirlau, 237 in Wil Fortification, 703 in the Temir district, and 916 in other districts (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 181). As a result, Kazakhs would no longer be able to graze or water their cattle in these areas. The regional administration only began officially allocating land to settlers in 1886. That year, land was assigned exclusively to settlements near the Embenskoye and Wilskeye fortifications. Records show that by the end of the year, 43 family peasants had been settled in Embenskoye Fortification and 34 in Wilskeye Fortification (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 179).

This area was also affected by unauthorised resettlement, as Russian peasants began leasing land independently, without waiting for official accommodation. Despite the military governor’s announcement “that there was no possibility for the resettlement of farmers” (OGA00. F. 6. Op. 10. D. 8467/1. L. 17), there were instances in the 1880s when several family peasants settled on the banks of the Ilek and Utva rivers, as well as near Aul No. 3 of Zhirenkopinskaya Volost, and leased Kazakh lands (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 179). These facts demonstrate that despite the official ban on the resettlement of Russian peasants in the Ural region, farmsteads had already begun to emerge there by the 1880s.

In the 70s–90s of the 19th century, thousands of free migrants, supported by the colonial administration, settled in the vicinity of the Ural and Turgai regions. In 1895, there were 24,000 settlers in Kustanai Uyezd and 5,400 in Aktobe Uyezd (Russkie..., 1897: 4).

The number of Russian peasants who had settled in Turgai and Irgiz uyezds, where the resettlement process was believed to have occurred very “insignificantly”, reached 2,000 people by 1897 (Auezova, 1958: 34). According to Oganovsky’s calculations, 13,794 individuals applied for resettlement to the Ural region before 1891 (Gaines 1, 1897: 14), and they were placed near fortifications and towns. The settlers became actual masters of these lands and a socio-political stronghold of the tsarist government in the Kazakh steppe.

As for “giving land” to the most reliable instrument of colonial policy, the Cossack army, tsarism was very generous. The Cossacks, accustomed to having their liberties and demands supported by the colonial authorities, were not satisfied even though they had sufficient hayfields and pastures. They requested the expulsion of Kazakhs from the left bank of the Ural River (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 173).

The Cossacks began to seize fertile lands from the local population by force. As a result, the Kazakh population was forced to rent from the Cossacks the very lands that had been taken from them. Therefore, Russian peasants went so far as to openly seize Kazakh lands. For example, in September 1883, newly arrived residents of the Kustanai settlement “uprooted trees, ploughed and sowed more than 3,000 dessiatinas of land” belonging to Kazakhs from Aul No. 2 of Arakaragai Volost. They even cultivated land near Kazakh wintering grounds and physically assaulted Kazakhs who resisted them (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 2091. L. 17). As these actions led to clashes between local Kazakhs and settlers, in March 1884 the Orenburg administration urgently transferred the district centre from Troitsk to Kustanai (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 2091. L. 50).

In the spring of 1887, Protzenko instructed Derbisali Berkimbayev, a junior assistant to the district chief, to force Kazakhs to “voluntarily” give up their lands. As a result, 81 Kazakhs from Aktobe and Karatogai Volosts were coerced into “voluntarily allocating” their arable and haymaking lands for the construction of the city (Abenova, 2019: 76).

The military governor, Major-General Barabash, wrote on 17 January 1890 that “the placement of settlers on the land leased from the Kirghiz is a lawful enterprise”, and that the administration had no right to prevent it. The authorities understood that a genuine process of resettlement was unfolding before their eyes. The majority of those who moved to the Kazakh steppes would not leave the Turgai region; sooner or later, they would have to be permanently settled on the occupied lands. However, the administration had neither the means nor the capacity to do so (OGA00. F. 10. Op. 6. D. 17. L. 9). This “helplessness” of the colonial authorities created favourable conditions for the transformation of Russian peasants, who initially rented Kazakh land for a limited period, into permanent landowners. The administration, which adapted tsarist legislation to serve colonial objectives, required nothing more.



The forced displacement of 35,000 Kazakhs from Turgai into lifeless, barren steppes by the tsarist administration was certain to lead to their gradual extermination. This reality was recognised even by Governor Barabash, who wrote in his 1888 report that 29 per cent, that is, nearly one third of the land allocated to Kazakh auls, was saline and unsuitable for cattle breeding. He warned that transferring such lands to the Kazakhs without modification would inevitably result in their impoverishment ([TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 2127. L. 256-275](#)).

So, only in Nikolaevsky Uyezd, between 1885 and 1888, twelve tenant settlements were organised within a territory located 5 to 80 kilometres from Kustanai ([OGA.OO. F. 10. Op. 6. D. 17. L. 9-10](#)). According to official records, by 1900 there were, in addition to these twelve settlements, ninety-five peasant farms and farmsteads in the county, with a total population of 5,110 people and 733 houses constructed ([Rossiia..., 1903: 33](#)). The Special Commission, created by order of the Military Ministry in 1865, made a decision to transfer the left bank of the Ural River into the possession of the Cossacks. As a result, 12,065 Kazakh households, which had previously owned this land, were left with only 24,948 dessiatinas of hayfields with sparse vegetation ([Suleimenov, 1963: 253](#)). Each Kazakh family, therefore, received just 2 dessiatinas of land. Governor-General Kryzhanovsky fully approved the decision of the commission.

In the course of reforms throughout the second half of the 19th century, particular attention was paid to the establishment of regional justice. This system was intended not only to coordinate social relations but also to reflect and enforce the political interests of the Russian Empire ([Anisimova, 2022: 208](#)).

***Consequences and Significance of the Reform: Social and Economic Changes.*** With the introduction of the 1868 reform, the tsarist government opened the way for the economic development of this vast region. To achieve this objective, it turned to one of the most reliable instruments of its colonial policy, namely, the resettlement of Russian peasants in Kazakh lands.

The new administrative division of the Kazakh steppe disrupted the traditional system of pasture use and fragmented large clans, which led to the weakening of the authority held by clan leaders. The auditor of the Turkestan region, K. Palen, cited the reasoning behind the tsarist government's artificial division of the Kazakh steppe: "the division of 'Kirghiz' on the basis of clan relations was legally eliminated, this measure is carried out in connection with the fact that the unification of a large clan under the leadership of one ancestor makes it difficult to maintain peace in the steppe" ([Selskoe..., 1910: 9](#)). Ultimately, the shift to a territorial principle of division was driven by the political and military interests of tsarism.

As for the consequences of the reforms and colonisation, Russian peasants who settled in the Kazakh lands did not bring with them a developed agricultural culture. This fact was acknowledged by tsarist officials themselves. For instance, I. Anichkov admitted that many settlers came from among those "who remained at a low stage of development" and therefore could not "have a significant impact" on the life of the Kazakhs ([Anichkov, 1889: 141-142](#)). In 1890, the military governor Y. F. Barabash wrote that "among the settlers there are some who came to the steppe for profit. They rent large areas of land, which they assign to the poorest settlers at high prices. Some wish to take advantage of the abundant harvests of the virgin soil for a few years. Those and others, after reaching the goal, that is, profit, and when the soil is already exhausted, will return home or move to other even more favourable places" ([OGA.OO. F. 10. Op. 6. D. 17. L. 10](#)).

Indeed, over a number of years, these settlers exhausted the fertile virgin lands allocated to them, eventually abandoning the territories and turning them into lifeless and unproductive spaces.

A. Bokeykhanov revealed the true motivations behind the actions of the early Russian settlers. He wrote that they were rude, ignorant individuals with a troubled past and uncivilised habits. Although, to some extent, they appeared more developed than the local population, they were not so advanced as to engage in peaceful cultural work immediately after subjugating the indigenous people. Moreover, they made no meaningful attempts to utilise the natural resources wisely or to sustain themselves through their own labour. Instead, they opted for an easier path to enrichment, which involved either plundering the subjugated population or exploiting the region's natural wealth without restraint ([Bukeykhanov, 1895: 6](#)). Such was the true nature of those who were believed to have brought culture and innovation to the Kazakh people. Can it therefore be rightly claimed that Russian peasants brought progress and benefit to the Kazakh steppe?

A. Kaufman, one of the ideologists of colonial policy, believed that "for the Kyrgyz, farming is not good but harmful. It is impossible to create conditions for the development of agriculture, it is necessary to prevent it in every possible way" ([Moshchensky, 1914: 50](#)).

He further argued that the development of agriculture among the Kazakhs would lead to the decline of animal husbandry, which he called a "national cause", thereby openly revealing his true intentions. Clearly, the issue at stake was not the well-being of the Kazakhs, but the interests of the Russian state. The Kazakh steppe was seen as a source of cheap livestock products, and Kazakh horses met the needs of the tsar's cavalry. The Kazakhs' ability to pay numerous duties and taxes to the state was directly tied to the success of their animal husbandry.

At the same time, the reduction of pastures, restrictions on free movement between wintering and summering grounds, and the deterioration of water and fodder supply created significant obstacles to the development of cattle breeding. The traditional economy of the Kazakh people was brought to the brink of collapse, a consequence of the same colonial policies implemented by the tsarist regime.



Most officials viewed the nomadic way of life as a sign of savagery or idleness. They failed to acknowledge the needs of this ancient craft, which had long sustained the Kazakh population, and they disregarded the national interests of the people. The steppe population, whose nomadic economy had developed in response to the vastness of the territory and the surrounding natural conditions, found themselves in a dire position as they were increasingly alienated from their ancestral lands.

As a result, the mass grazing of livestock and the decline of the economy significantly worsened the living conditions of the Kazakhs. Food shortages led to famine in the villages. People became ill after consuming the meat of emaciated and diseased cattle. Stripped of their clothing, swollen from hunger, many suffered from epidemic diseases. Some even froze to death in the stormy steppe while searching for food for themselves and their livestock. During the dzhut of 1879–1880 in the Turgai region, “35 people froze” (Orenburg..., 1880). Some Kazakhs, having lost all their livestock, were forced to work for the Cossacks who had taken their land “for a piece of black bread and some slop, which even a rich man’s dog would shun” (Vostochnoe obozrenie, 1882).

The alienation of the vast Kazakh population inhabiting the steppe regions from the best lands led to economic decline. For example, due to a severe winter in 1873, which brought deep snow and ice, 345,177 head of livestock perished among the Kirghiz of the Akmola and Sarysu districts (Abselemov, 2019: 69).

Kazakhs’ wintering grounds were often selected for Russian settlements due to their suitability for ploughing. The local administration delayed the payment of meagre compensation for destroyed winter camps and outbuildings. Kazakhs were forced to rent winter quarters or use summer pastures during winter, which created further difficulties, as land used in summer could not support grazing all year round. In this way, colonial policy destroyed wintering grounds, reduced summer pastures, and established Russian settlements across traditional herding routes, ultimately turning the Kazakh people into wanderers and vagabonds.

The tsarist administration actively supported and legitimised the unauthorised appropriation of Kazakh lands by settlers. The process of land seizure was guided by the principle of the “superiority of the strong”. As a result, the colonisation policy of the Russian Empire caused irreparable damage to the way of life of the steppe population and to the traditional Kazakh livelihood based on cattle breeding. Turgayskaya Gazeta wrote that “the allocation of the best of the Kirghiz winter and summer pastures in terms of soil and vegetation quality to foreign settlers for colonial purposes deprived the Kirghiz of the opportunity to feed their livestock sufficiently and brought their system of land use to a dead end” (Turgayskaya Gazeta, 1907).

Indeed, the movement of herds from north to south along traditional nomadic routes became increasingly difficult and, in some places, ceased altogether. The established nomadic system and the customary rotation of winter and summer pastures were disrupted, and the overall territory used for the annual cycle of nomadism was steadily reduced.

The Kazakhs could no longer fatten their livestock during the summer to prepare them for the fierce winter storms and freezing temperatures. The premature trampling of pastures surrounding the winter huts eliminated the possibility of conducting tebenevka during the cold months. Due to the shrinking of summer pastures, the Kazakhs were forced to return to their winter huts much earlier than planned. The livestock, arriving before the first snowfall, had only time to turn the tebenevki into dust. The shrinking of seasonal camps, the lack of water and hay for livestock, poor fodder reserves, icy weather, and fierce storms led to the mass death of animals.

During the dzhut of 1879–1880, Kazakhs in the Ural region lost seven-eighths of all horses, three-quarters of their cattle and sheep, and one-fifth of their camels (Orenburg, 1880: 89). In the Turgai region, 44 per cent of horses and sheep, and 30 per cent of cattle and camels perished (Dobrosmyslov, 1895: 29). The Ural region alone recorded an 80 per cent loss of horses and cattle.

In the Turgai region, 1,528,679 of 3,662,737 head of livestock were lost during the repeated dzhut of 1879–1880, while during the dzhut known as *kishi koyan* (literally “small hare”, referring to the year of the hare) of 1891–1892, 1,198,451 of 3,355,743 animals died (Dobrosmyslov, 1895: 6). According to archival materials, the dzhut plunged cattle breeding, the main livelihood of the local people, into a prolonged crisis. It deprived the economy of its former prosperity and “significantly lowered the living standards of the Kyrgyz” (OGA.OO. F. 6. Op. 10. D. 8565. L. 7).

At the same time, the local authorities actively obstructed the transition of Kazakhs to agriculture by imposing multiple restrictions. For example, N. I. Veselovsky noted that the administration, “frightened by the Kirghiz aspiration to farming, tried to hinder these aspirations in every possible way. The administration believed that by preventing the Kirghiz from farming they could subjugate them and make them directly dependent on Russia”. The Orenburg Governor-General Perovsky, who held a similar position, introduced a strict ban on the construction of dugouts, mazanoks, and, more broadly, any form of permanent dwellings in the steppe (Veselovsky, 1897: 209–210).

Despite these obstacles imposed by the tsarist authorities, the Kazakhs did not abandon farming. For example, out of 8,949,725 poods of grain harvested in the Ural region in 1895 (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 100), 59.5 per cent was harvested by Kazakhs (Pamyatnaya knizhka..., 1897: 38). That year, Kazakhs in the Turgai region cultivated 104,585 dessiatinas of land, accounting for 76.8 per cent of all crops in the region (TsGA RK. F. 25. Op. 1. D. 511/a. L. 2).

These figures demonstrate that the proportion of land cultivated and grain harvested by Kazakhs remained consistently high. This undermines the narrative promoted in Soviet-era literature that Russian peasants were the exclusive “bearers of progress” to the Kazakh steppe.

The reforms enabled the tsarist government to take measures that created optimal conditions for implementing a predatory and colonial agrarian policy with complete impunity. The interests of the local population were not taken into account. On the contrary, fertile lands and water resources were to be seized from the Kazakhs and they were to be displaced to barren, arid areas, while their lands were to be allocated to Russian settlers and Cossack troops. These practices had already been carried out during earlier phases of colonisation. This poorly considered policy led to the disruption of the traditional system of pasture use, the restriction of free movement between winter and summer pastures, and ultimately to the forced confinement of the Kazakhs to permanent stables. Until the 1870s, the colonisation of the Steppe region served primarily military and political purposes. The government constructed various fortifications and enticed peasants from European Russia who were converted into Cossacks in order to increase the number of armed men and reinforce Russian dominance in the region. Starting from the 1870s, the settlement of the steppe regions “assumed the character of exclusively agricultural colonisation, which gave the following types: to develop agricultural and commercial industry and farming in the region; to bring the Russian and Kirghiz nationalities closer together; to influence in this way the manners of the nomadic population and accustom them to rural occupations and bread-making; to achieve through this a more or less close transition of the Kirghiz from a nomadic to a settled state; to bring the Russian population through colonisation to such a number that it could staff the troops located in the region, and would have a sufficient reserve in case if political events caused the need to concentrate military forces in another neighbouring district” (TsGA RK. F. 64. Op. 1. D. 125. L. 460b.).

As a result of military colonisation, the entire territory of Kazakhstan was overrun by Cossack troops. New fortifications, outposts, and redoubts were established. These structures became the main strongholds of tsarist expansion and full colonisation of the interior.

The settlement of postal, trade, and salt transport routes was also pursued to ensure reliable communication across the region and to organise functional staging points. As a result, land plots offered to settlers were allocated exclusively along postal and trade roads.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the declaration of Kazakh land as state property in the “Provisional Regulation” of 1868 opened the way for the tsarist government to initiate extensive colonisation of the Kazakh steppe. The concept of “state ownership” of land became, on the one hand, a foundation for the establishment of a socio-political stronghold in the region, and on the other, a justification for the exploitation of the vast natural wealth of Kazakh territories. All of this occurred under the observation, support, and often direct involvement of the colonial administration.

However, the seizure of Kazakh lands in favour of Cossacks and settlers during the period from the 1860s to the 1890s represented only a transitional stage in the economic transformation of Kazakhstan. By the late 1880s, the tsarist government had begun to develop a new legislative framework, which paved the way for even broader and more intensive colonisation of the Kazakh steppe.

As a result, the tsarist administration continuously allocated land to the insatiable Cossacks. As T. Sedelnikov notes, the colonisation of the steppe by the Cossacks began in the mid-eighteenth century and continued uninterrupted until the final quarter of the nineteenth century. During this time, tens of millions of dessiatinas of the most fertile Kazakh lands were gradually taken away. Officers believed that even the solonchak lands left to the Kazakhs after the redistribution were more than they deserved. Consequently, part of the million-dessiatina territory was confiscated: one portion was designated for mining, another for forest dachas. Nearly 68,000 dessiatinas were allocated for roads, incorporated into the Trinity exchange area and caravan routes.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, 10,000 dessiatinas of suitable land from this same area were handed over to settlers and the Orenburg Cossack Army. The issue of the resettlement of Kazakh auls, which had been left without land and subjected to harsh living conditions, was only “resolved” more than twenty years later.

Thus, the Kazakhs were deprived of the opportunity to use their own land, forests, fish-rich rivers and lakes, and the dense thickets of reeds that they traditionally used as fuel. Salt mines and hunting grounds were transferred by decision of the tsarist government to the possession of the Ural and Orenburg Cossack troops, as well as to the governors-general. Forest resources were used for the construction of military fortifications and placed under the protection of military command. The Kazakhs were left without natural shelter from the winter cold and lost access to both fodder and fuel.

They were forbidden to fish in the Ural, Ori, and Shalkar lakes. As A. Kaufman stated, fishing in the Ural River became a monopoly of the Ural army. All the fish in the river became the exclusive property of the military community. The declaration of Kazakh land as state property under the “Provisional Provision” brought considerable profit to the imperial treasury. However, this so-called state ownership did not prevent the parallel development of private landownership. Through a series of legislative acts, the tsarist

government granted military personnel substantial privileges in the form of land allocations. By the end of the nineteenth century, “family plots” owned by generals, officers, and civil officials amounted to 474,949 dessiatinas in the territory of the Orenburg Cossack Army alone. These individuals often expanded their holdings beyond the legal limit and distributed land at their own discretion.

As for the future prospects of studying the outlined problem, further research could focus on its specific aspects. In particular, attention may be directed towards investigating Kazakh uprisings against the authorities of the Russian Empire, as well as conducting a more in-depth analysis of the concept of “jute” and the role played by tsarist policy in its emergence. It is also important to examine in greater detail certain aspects of the development of Kazakh society during both the post-reform and pre-reform periods.

During the famine of 1879–1880, 35 people froze to death in the Turgai region. At the same time, some Kazakhs, having lost their livestock, worked as labourers for the Cossacks who had taken their land, just to get a piece of black bread. They were reduced to poverty and died of cold and disease. Some Kazakhs began to engage in agriculture and crafts. The colonial policy pursued by the tsarist regime towards the Kazakhs brought disaster and evil to the Kazakh people.

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