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Russian Policy toward Kalmyks and Jungars during the Decline of the Jungar Khanate

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This paper focuses on Russian policies toward Kalmyks and Jungars during the Jungar Khanate's decline. The empirical data in this paper are drawn from documents belonging to the Orenburg and Moscow archives. In the 18th century the Kalmyk Khanate was relatively independent autonomy within the Russian Empire. Because of its political status Kalmyk Khanate could have own foreign policy. Russian authorities did not accept this fact. However they reconciled to use Kalmyk resources in its relationship with China.

Key words: Archives, Russian Empire, geopolitical games, China, Ottoman Empire, Kalmyks, Great Mongolian Empire, Oirats, Volga region, vassal territory

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1. Introduction

When it widened its borders rapidly in the early 18th century, the Russian Empire had to solve the problem of its protection. As a new empire, Russia clashed with the interests of other powerful countries. It became involved in geopolitical games and had to negotiate with veteran players, including powerful neighbors: the Qing Empire in the East and Iran and the Ottoman Empire (with its vassal, the Crimean Khanate) in the South. Lacking the military and political resources necessary to win these games, Russia sought allies among other nearby peoples, including the Kalmycks, or Oirats (Western Mongolians)—successors to the Great Mongolian Empire. In the 17th century, the Oirats moved to the Volga region. This was unique: the nomads, heirs to the Mongolian Empire, had returned to the former vassal territory, the Golden Horde, and managed to establish their own statehood within the Russian Empire. While cultivating relations with Russia, the Kalmyks also preserved close ties with their relatives the Jungars. The Russian government in turn used the Kalmyk and Jungar

connections to strengthen its relations with China and further its imperial ambitions.

This paper focuses on policies pursued by the Russian administration toward Kalmyks and Jungars during the Jungar khanate's decline. The empirical data presented here are drawn from documents belonging to the Orenburg and Moscow archives.

2. Kalmyks and Jungars in the 18th century

Before discussing the main subject of the paper, I would like to say a few words about the Kalmyk Khanate, which claimed a degree of independence within the Russian Empire. From the Kalmyk point of view, the Russian emperor was only a military leader and did not have the right to interfere with Kalmyk administrative and economic affairs. While the Kalmyks expected some financial and military support from Russia, they also thought they would be allowed autonomy (Khodarkovsky 1992: 239). It was the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual and political leader, the Dalai Lama, who conferred the title of Khan on the first Kalmyk Khan, Ayuka Ayuka, and his successors. That is to say, the Khan derived authority from a source outside the Russian Empire.

This situation was unacceptable to the Russian administration, which sought to limit Kalmyk autonomy, and Russian representatives such as the Orenburg governor Neplueff paid very close attention to symbols of the Khan's power. Meanwhile, Peter Tayshin, son of Ayuka's eldest son Chakdorjab, had taken the Khan's stamp during the power struggle between Ayuka's heirs. After his death, this stamp passed to his wife, Anna Tayshina, making her the ruler of all baptized Stavropol Kalmyks. Her death provided an opportunity for seizing the stamp. According to the Orenburg governor's secret decree, "this stamp should be found in secret from the Kalmyks and sent here to the College [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] because it had been sent to Ayuka by the Dalai Lama. It should not be handed to them" (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.1:77 back).¹

The Kalmyks cultivated their independence by building relations with other countries, especially the Jungar Khanate. This fact was very significant in the Russian-Kalmyk relationship because the Jungar Khanate played an important geopolitical role in Central Asia: Russia perceived its political relations with China and Central Asian countries through the lens of the Russian-Kalmyk-Jungar relationship. The Jungar Khanate caused serious trouble for Russia in Siberia, but the Russian government was forced to compromise with the Jungars because of its own lack of military resources.

During this time, feuds among the Jungar elite and the establishment of the Qing Empire put the Jungar Khanate in a difficult position. In the summer of 1756, the Manchu army—which had fought with the Jungar—reached the Russian border. Concerned about border security, the Russian government sought reliable information about the situation. Weakened by the war and internal strife, some of the Jungarian elite requested Russian citizenship—along with some of the Altaians had been subject to them.

The Russian authorities granted citizenship to the Jungars, but they insisted on conversion to Orthodoxy as a solution to the problem of the new citizens' identity. The Jungars were sent to Stavropol-on-Volga,² among them very powerful people such as Norbo Danzhin, a cousin of the last Jungarian ruler, Amursana. Amursana had escaped from Manchurian troops

and hidden among the Kazakhs (AFA. “Jungarian cases,” 1757.C. 2, 1:179).³⁾ According to I. Zlatkin, the Russian government desired neither that the Jungar Khanate gain power nor that it be absorbed by the Qing Empire—nor that its subjects, the Kazaks, gain independence (Zlatkin 1958: 307). Dealing with such important representatives of the Jungarian elite as Norbu Danzhin was therefore a challenge.

The Russian government decided to be very generous. Norbu Danzhin, renamed “Dmitry Yakovlev” after converting to Orthodoxy, received the rank of colonel and was appointed judge instead of the baptized Kalmyk noble Pawel Torgoutsky. According to the Decree of the College of Foreign Affairs, he was also given “two hundred rubles.” His zaysang (noble) Ulyumzhi, renamed “Stepan Dmitriev” after converting, was given one hundred rubles, and four other subjects were given thirty rubles each, along with dresses and coats. The noyon (prince) was presented with five yards of cloth and twelve yards of golden or silver brocade (the price of brocade being seven rubles a yard), while his servants received cloth and damask (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.4: 227–228).⁴⁾

When the government ordered the Stavropol commandant, Ostankov, to do his best to receive the Jungars, he proposed to settle the zaysangs in the city, where they could enjoy good living conditions. In a secret report dated July 5, 1757, he wrote to the government about the accommodation of Norbu Danzhin and his people in Stavropol-on-Volga (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.4: 227–228).⁵⁾ This report also contained information about two zaysangs and their wives and 127 ordinary citizens. The commandant had to distribute them among baptized Stavropol Kalmyks, settle them in their quarters, and provide them with money and cattle. Ostankov asked in the report if the government would send some money for the Jungars “coming out in citizenship of Empress Anna” so they could maintain themselves and have livestock and other possessions (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.45: 119–122).⁶⁾

New subjects were considered by the Russian authorities a reliable source of information about the latest Jungar-China events. In a secret Decree of Foreign Affairs to the Orenburg governor Tevkelev, Norbu Danzhin told of the latest Jungarian events and the fate of the Jungarian elite while explaining the genealogies of the Jungarian clans. According to the Decree, “this Jungarian prince was invited here to get from him the latest news about the Jungarian situation and considerations for making decisions concerning the situation of the Jungarian elite who stayed there. It was very important to have” (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.1: 197).⁷⁾

The College of Foreign Affairs, wondering how many Jungarian nobles did not want to be under Qing rule, inquired of the Orenburg governor Tevkelev whether there were Jungarian clans that would not accept Chinese authority. The Decree counted the Jungars who came to the Semipalatinsk fortress in 1758: “six Torgouts noyons [princes]—Zanam, Maamut, Sheareng, Uranhay, Louzang Jhap, and Norbu Cherin—with a thousand tents and five thousand people left the fortress of Semipalatinsk and went to Stavropol-on-Volga” (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.1: 199).⁸⁾

The other reason for the College of Foreign Affairs’s interest in the Jungars was the question of returning 15,000 Torgouts to Russian citizenship. Fifty years before the events just described, in 1701, the son of Khan Ayuka Sanzhip had led his subject Kalmyks to Jungaria, forced to do so by his Jungarian wife. Sanzhip left Russia because of family feuds prompted by adultery committed by Ayukoy with one of his daughters-in-law, one of

twelve wives of Ayka's eldest son Chakdordzhab. The sons rebelled against Khan Ayuka, who was convicted of the crime. This was a difficult time for the Kalmyk Khanat.

When Sanzhip arrived in Jungaria, his brother-in-law Khan Tsevan Rabtan insulted him, seized his property, and sent him back to his father. Khan Tsevan Rabtan explained these actions by saying that Sanzhip had stolen tents belonging to his father, Ayuke Khan.

The College of Foreign Affairs was so interested in the return of the Kalmyks that officials were not confused by the question of whether they were really the Kalmyks belonging to Sanzhip. The College therefore decided to give Russian citizenship to the Kalmyks wandering along the Russian-Chinese border. The Russian government sent a paper to Chinese officials, declaring that "Jungars would be given Russian citizenship" and justifying the decision by claiming that it would prevent the Kalmyks from continuing to steal Chinese cattle. The document reads, "Whether those Torgout owners escaped from Russia with the Ayuka's son Sanzhip in 1701 or stayed there during the time when this nation moved to the Volga region ... No matter where they came from they would be taken under the patronage of the Empress Anna" (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.1: 199 back).⁹⁾

Russia thus strengthened its border security while increasing its number of subjects and gaining badly needed soldiers. Troublesome neighbors such as the Jungars would be kept under better control and away from national borders. In pursuing their own policy, Russian diplomats also tried to convince China that removing the Jungars to Russia was consistent with Chinese interests.

In short, the Russian government was interested in the Jungars. From its point of view, the benefits Russia reaped from the Jungar and Kalmyk presence exceeded the damage the Russian population suffered from Kalmyk attacks. It was beneficial for the Russian government to keep both Kalmyks and Jungars as subjects.

3. Why the fortress Stavropol-on-Volga was built

The question is why the Jungars were sent to Stavropol-on-Volga. An important factor in the Russian-Kalmyk (Jungarian) relationship was the acculturation needed to solve the inherent conflict between the settled and nomadic peoples of the Russian Empire. The empire was in need of loyal subjects and faithful defenders of its borders. After the Kalmyks had been Russian subjects for a century, it was time to think about their identity within the empire. The chosen strategy of acculturation consisted of converting to Christianity and transitioning to a sedentary lifestyle. Russian authorities employed religious conversion as a tactic for increasing their influence on the nomads, but in fact Christianization became a kind of token-money in the political game played between Russian officials and the nomadic elite.

Archival documents describing the building of Stavropol-on-Volga's fortress illustrate this process of acculturation. These documents clarify Russian methods of controlling the Kalmyks and the principles on which their control was based.

Contemporary Russian historians claim that the famous statesman and historian Vassily Tatischev established the fortress. In my opinion, it was noyon (prince) Donduk-Ombo who played a leading role in the decision to build a fortress for baptized Kalmyks in the Samara region. Donduk-Ombo supported his cousin Peter Tayshin (Baksaday Dorji) in his project of

settling all baptized Kalmyks. This request would not have been granted if Donduk-Ombo had not been interested in the resettlement of the baptized Kalmyks outside the Kalmyk khanate. Prince Tayshin used Orthodoxy as a source of power to gain the title of Khan, but Donduk-Ombo turned Tayshin's weapon against him and removed a contender for the title from the Khanate.

Building a fortress for baptized Kalmyks would solve several problems by, first, reinforcing the troops defending the borders with Kalmyks; second, creating a model of nomad acculturation; and, finally, ending the Kalmyk feuds. More precisely, the Kalmyk feuds prompted Russian officials to build a fortress that would help solve the two other problems.

Stavropol-on-Volga was supposed to be a kind of "melting pot" where the Kalmyks' new identity would be created. Though converted to Orthodoxy, they remained nomads. The issue of transitioning the Stavropol Kalmyks to agriculture was vital for the Russian administration until the relocation of the Kalmyks to Orenburg. The land generously allotted them remained barren and unused because the Kalmyks preferred to subsist on livestock breeding and trading. Meanwhile, the Samara region's population increased, and Russian and Mordovian peasants asked repeatedly that authorities grant them the Kalmyk land. The governor Putjatin suggested in a report dated April 10, 1768 (30 years after the fortress was built), that the number of Russians and newly baptized Mordovians settled among the Kalmyks should be increased: "and in the villages Teneevskaya, Avralinskaya, and Cherkalinskaya, where only Kalmyks live, Russians and the newly baptized (Mordovians) could settle" (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.145: 141–143 back).¹⁰⁾

In his opinion, the new neighbors would benefit the Kalmyks by helping them get used to their new lifestyle and to the *fundamental settlement*. Governor Putjatin drew special attention to the Jungars who did not know Russian manners and were not be able to correct this. Only resettlement among Russians could help them. He wrote that the Jungars were *still new* people and *unaccustomed* to the Russian way of life. They could not improve their situation without help from Russians and other peasants. From his point of view, peasants who *lived in houses* and *cultivated land* would provide examples to follow. Living among them would help the Kalmyks become a people living in their own houses and producing cereals (SAOO. F.3.L.1. C.145: 142 back).¹¹⁾

Thus, granting settlers permission to live on Kalmyk land promoted efficient land use and provided the boundary areas with cereals, helping to increase the Samara region's population.

4. Conclusion

1. The Kalmyk Khanate and Jungars played important roles in Russian foreign policy, particularly toward China, in the 18th century.
2. The Stavropol-on-Volga fortress was intended not only as a fortification but also as a settlement where the acculturation of nomadic Kalmyks and Jungars could take place.
3. While creating the Russian Empire, its builders demonstrated flexibility in their relations with nomads who would one day be Russian subjects.

Abbreviations

SAOO : State Archive of Orenburg Oblast

AFA : Archive of Foreign Affairs

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Notes

- 1) Decree of the College of Foreign Affairs to Orenburg governor Neplueff on giving to Donduk-Dashi the stamp and the armor of Peter Tayshin, 1744, March 16. (State Archive of Orenburg Oblast, (SAOO). F.3. L.1. C.1: 77 back).
- 2) According to the Decree of Empress Anna, the Stavropol-on-Volga fortress was built as a settlement for baptized Kalmyks in 1738. This settlement was established by the request of Baksadaya Dorji, who was renamed the prince Peter Tayshin.
- 3) Archive of Foreign Affairs, (AFA). F. “Jungarian cases,” 1757, C.2: 179.
- 4) «нойону, двести рублёв, зайсангу Улюмжи, а по крещении Степану Дмитриеву, сто, находящимся же при них служителям из зенгорцов же четырёх человекам по тридцати рублёв каждому. А сверх того дать же им и на платье, а имянно нойону на кафтан сукна пять аршин, а полукафтаны золотной или серебряной парчи двенадцать аршин (ценою) от семи рублёв аршин, зайсангу сукна то ж число аршин до трёх рублёв аршин и на полукафтаны штофу двенадцать аршин до четырёх рублёв аршин, а четырёх при них находящимся служителям на кафтаны каждому по пяти ж аршин сукна от двух рублёв с половиною и на полукафтаны изголей». Decree of the Collage of Foreign Affairs to Orenburg governor about awards to Jungar Kalmyks arriving at Stavropol, 1758, September 17. (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.4: 227–228).
- 5) Decree of the College of Foreign Affairs to Orenburg governor about awards to Jungar Kalmyks arriving at Stavropol, 1758, September 17 (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.4).
- 6) Report of Stavropol commandant Ostankova to Orenburg governor Neplueff about awards to Jungar Kalmyks arriving at Stavropol, 1757, July 5. (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.45).
- 7) Decree of the College of Foreign Affairs to Orenburg governor Tevkelev and advisor of the provincial government Rychkov on the evidence of the noyon Norbu Danzhin on the situation in Jungaria in 1758 (SAOO. F.3. L.1).
- 8) Decree of the College of Foreign Affairs to Orenburg governor Tevkelev and advisor of the provincial government Rychkov on the evidence of the noyon Norbu Danzhin on the situation in Jungaria in 1758 (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.1).

- 9) «О тех ли торгоутских владельцев, которые при сыне Аюки-хана Санжипе в 1701 году в зенгорский народ от Волги ушли, или от оставших в тамошних местах торгоутов, издревле в то время когда напред сего в давних годах сия нация на Волгу перешла, однако ж от кого они ни произошли, принять их в протекцию Е.И.В. было можно толь наипаче, ибо о том, что впредь зенгорцы, к здешним границам приходящие, в протекцию Е.И.В. приниманы будут, и листом отсюда в китайский трибунал 17 февраля сего 1758 года отправленным, формальным образом знать дано с тем, что инако и при случае им в том отказа принуждены они будут скитаться в тамошних степях и при границах чинить воровство, и потому, ежели с китайской стороны не желают, дабы зенгорцы на здешние границы впредь выходили, в таком случае от их попечения и распоряжения имеет зависеть их в отдалённые места завести или инако каким-либо другим способом к тому их не допускать, дабы они из определённых мест не выходили и к здешним границам не приближались». (SAOO. F.3. L.1. C.1).
- 10) Report of Orenburg governor Putiatin to the Senate about relocation of state peasants from neighboring provinces to Stavropol, 1768, April 10. (SAOO. F.3. L.1.C.145).
- 11) «особливо зенгорские люди ещё новые и необычные, и не толко строения, но и обхождения русского совершенно не разумеют, да и за скудость свою того исправить не могут, а когда де между ими и в помянутых слободах, где они, калмыки, поселены, находиться будут такие люди, которые домами живут и пашни производят, то и они, калмыки, от такого общества охотнее к тому привыкать и со временем сами домами жить и хлебопашество производить». (SAOO. F.3. L.1.C.145).