

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF KALMYK SOCIETY IN THE XIX CENTURY: TRANSFORMATION OF THE LEGAL STATUS

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This article deals with the state policy of the Russian Empire in the XIX century on the territory of the Kalmyk steppe that resulted to a change in the social status of the traditional groups of the estates. Finally the authors concluded that the social structure of the Kalmyk society, used to improve management efficiency and to strengthen the administrative hierarchy until 1892, when it was finally destroyed traditional the institutions of the estates of the Kalmyks.

**Keywords:** social history, Kalmyk steppe, estate, history of Russia in the XIX., History of Kalmykia in the XIX, domestic policy.

**F**ormulation of the problem. In the first half of the XVII century the Kalmyk people were granted Russian citizenship and therefore found themselves in different geopolitical conditions. However, they kept the traditional way of life and an already established social structure. Previous to this the Kalmyk people had an administrative system that was suited to the then nomadic way of life and the level of economic and cultural development. In the XIX century the Russian imperial administration started introducing their laws into those territories where the people were not of Russian nationality.

**Analysis of the latest studies and publications.** Problems of the social structure of the Kalmyk society relate to acute issues of modern scientific research, although it should be noticed that the research of Kalmykia in the historical aspect attracted the attention of professional scientists since long time. Since the end of XVIII century the scholars I.I. Lepyokhin [1], P.S. Pallas [2] and I.G. Georgy [3] presented neat descriptions of their travels and left valuable information about the Kalmyk people. In the XIX century the Russian scholars and other intellectuals continued the research of Kalmykia. Such descriptors of social structure were N.A. Nefediev [4], F.A. Buller [5], P.I. Nebolsin [6] and others.

Since 1990s the theme of researches of the social structure expanded and became actual, some problems and periods of the social history, social development and of the development of the traditional social structure of Kalmyks being under research. The most famous works reflecting that tendency were created by A.N. Komandzhaev [7], V.V. Batyrov [8], and others.

**Selection of the unsolved aspects of the problem.** Imperial decrees slightly regulated social relationships but with the aim mainly to benefit the privileged elite. In this regard, in the first half of the XIX century Kalmyk society, was still divided into two main classes: exempt – for secular and spiritual lords and taxable – for commoners. The former include noyons (kalmyk – a lord/leader originated from the verb «noyolhu» – rule) zaisangs (*zaisang* (tszaysang) – aimag governor) and their families. These people were *tsagaan yasta* category, i.e. white bone. The estate belonged to this group and representatives of the Buddhist clergy, such as Lama (the highest spiritual ministers), Bakshi (teachers of faith), gelyungi (priests) and others.

High social status of the aristocracy in the Kalmyk society was due to their administrative functions. At the top of the hierarchy were noyons – uluses – major landowners. Noyons had a staff of special officers to manage the administration. The following were the Noyon's officials:

*darga* – estate manager,

*demchey* – tax collector looking after 40 tents or families «kibitka»,

*shulenga* – tax collector looking after 20 tents or families, heads of «*khoton*» (*khoton* – the lowest administrative unit. Association of families who live a nomadic way of life within a certain territory), etc.

According to customary law noyons had the right to give one of their aimags (An aimag, is an administrative subdivision of kalmyks. Aimags, subdivided into hotons) private or hereditary use of a relative or a commoner for special service and would also become zaisangs. Kalmyk bailiff Mr K.Y. Vatsenko reported «in case of heavy crimes by zaisangs, owners had the right to take their aimags and pass them to their relatives, and in the absence of relatives to any worthy people» [9]. In this case, we see an example of downward vertical social mobility where noyons voluntarily became zaisangs and a commoner became a part of the Kalmyk privileged class.

Zaisangs were instructed to maintain constant surveillance of ordinary nomads in order to prevent unauthorized movement «otkochevka», escape or capture by the enemy. In Kalmyk encampments and aimags there was an order in which everyone had to live and roam but only within strictly defined areas and only in their own Ulus (Ulus, an administrative division of the Kalmyk khanate and the Kalmyk Steppe. Ulus, subdivided into aimags). These guidelines emerged from the policy of the nobility limiting and completely suppressing the free movement of the dependent population. Therefore, carelessness or negligence, manifested in overseeing albatu, regarded as a crime, and the perpetrating zaisangs subject to penalties. Unsupervised and free movement of the mass albatu made it difficult to collect taxes, the execution of duties, collecting militia put them at risk of capture by other noyons (lords).

The most important duty of a Zaisang was to collect taxes in favor of noyons. Records document Kalmyk noyons annually received taxes equivalent to one tenth of the livestock of the albatu. Moreover, in their favor zaisangs also levied taxes on ordinary nomads within their aimag. At the same time the number and size of requisitions were not limited. Famous scholar Mr I. Georgi noticed that taxes were often «gathered during the war, the prince's wedding, or when the rulers of small uluses wanted to live ... a bit fancier» [3, p. 7].

Living conditions changed for the Kalmyk people in the Russian Empire after the events of 1771 and led to further intervention in the affairs of Kalmykia. These changes made by the Russian government altered the class structure in the society. In the first half of the XIX century the most significant event in the development of the social structure of the Kalmyk

people was the introduction of the Regulation in 1834 [10, p. 685], when for the first time in the Russian legislation noyons zaisangs were recognized as equals in terms of their personal rights, hereditary nobility and honorary citizenship. The Regulation also reaffirmed primogeniture, thereby directly affecting the social and legal status of zaisangs. In the XVII–XVIII centuries, noyons and zaisangs always shared the uluses and aimags between their sons. Noyons were now forbidden to share their uluses among heirs, and zaisangs were also forbidden to share aimags. They were now obliged to hand down to their eldest son only. New social groups appeared in Kalmyk society: petty noyons who didn't own ulus and zaisangs without aimags. The difference was that zaisangs who owned aimags and were able to keep their noble status had hereditary honorary citizenship and bezaymachniy zaisang (i.e. not owning aimags) – personal right of honorary citizenship. Based on materials from the first general census of 1897, the number of hereditary and personal honorable citizens was 2282 people [11, p. 2-3, 150-161].

This paragraph of the Regulation entailed a whole series of trials, which lasted until 1892. Under the 1834 Regulation zaisangs and their descendants were deprived of all rights and opportunities to become zaisangs owning aimags since receiving the title of «honorary citizen», which could not be inherited by sons. For the children it meant a shift in the taxable estate. This question was the most painful and affected all sectors of society because the descendants of current aimag zaisangs (i.e. zaisangs who owned aimags) in 70–80s had to prove that their father or grandfather was aimag zaisang up to 1834 and therefore demanded an Aimag or honorary citizenship [12, p. 184]. Noyons also appealed to court because they treated as a precedent for the princely title the fact that princely families of Georgia received the titles of princes of the Russian Empire after the adoption of Treaty of St. George in 1783. Noyons of Tyumen, followed by the families of Tundutovs and Gahaevs did not leave their attempts to achieve princely title until the early XX century, continuing to call themselves princes [13, p. 15].

**The purpose of the article** is research of the state policy of the Russian Empire in the XIX century on the territory of the Kalmyk steppe that resulted to a change in the social status of the traditional groups of the estates.

**Basic material.** The Kalmyks class structure was directly linked to the Ulus-aimag system. Russian administration replaced noyons who owned uluses and therefore aimags zaisangs automatically became subordinated to it. This can be evidenced in the late XIX century by a letter of zaisang Sharnut – Chonosov, part of the family Suquet Zundueva sent in 1891 to the Kalmyk People Administration (UKN), where he was asking to become a manager of Aimag, after dismissal on the ground of illness. One can imagine that a zaisang was therefore dealing with administration in the same way he used to communicate with noyons [14].

*Albatu*, *shabiner* and *ketochiner* were considered lower social classes of Kalmyk society – *khar yasta* (black bone). *Albatu* were the most numerous class and fulfilled most of the duties in favor of noyons and zaisangs. They grazed cattle for Kalmyk nobility, brought natural and cash rents, carried out military service, paid additional duties by way of food contributions. *Shabiner* carried almost the same hardships as *albatu*, but only for the benefit of the clergy. Kalmyk noyons made major donations to the Buddhist church. They presented gifts of livestock and even

on occasions their servants. These people became the property of the church and were called *shabinyer*, i.e. novices. *Ketochiner* in Kalmyk society were groups of people who originally played the role of vigilantes for Noyons. By the XIX century their duties significantly changed and essentially they had become servants. Due to the existing system in the society they observed low level of social mobility.

The aspiration of the Russian administration was to consider the existing legal system of local customs and traditions when administered under the jurisdiction of the imperial legislation of Kalmyk steppe, also manifesting support of self-administration, which was based on kinship ties and customary norms. In 1847 «Management of Kalmyk people Regulation» was adopted which cemented the legal status of various social groups with a purpose to speed up their entry into the social structure of Russian society. Furthermore, the present situation in the legislative level for the first time was to consolidate the basis of local government in the form of ulus and aimag gatherings formed on the principle of elected officials, collective discussion and resolution of local issues. This legal norm can be regarded as a social elevator, allowing commoners who had respect in the society to take up a prestigious status.

Secular and spiritual nobility accumulated the full political and economic power and was the dominant upper class, but their number was not very large. Thus, according to the «Military Statistical Review for the Astrakhan province in 1850-1851» by 1850 state encampments consisted of 5785 tents (*kibitka*), 8817 «vladelcheskaya» tents, total – 14602 or 56000 people of both sexes. Besides these noyon families consisted of 27 males and 24 females, in total 51 people. Families of aimag zaisangs consisted of 667 males and 573 females, a total of 1240 people. Families of zaisangs without aimags consisted of 574 men and 436 women, a total of 1010 people. Clergy consisted of 2065 people. Thus, according to the information collected in 1850 Kalmyk people in total consisted of 15,054 tents or families [15].

According to the 1862 census 26,218 tents of commoners were recorded: 63,615 males and 51,645 females, owners 41 of both men and women, 3113 zaisangs, 1452 clergy, which eventually amounted to 119 866 people of both sexes. By 1870, according to the researcher A.K., the following number of Kalmyk males was recorded in the Astrakhan province: noyons – 17, aimag zaisangs – 421 zaisangs without aimags – 1494, Lamaist clergy (living in «Khurul» celibate monks) – 1201 and commoners – 65196 [16, p. 304].

It should be noted that in the beginning of the 60s of the XIX century census started in Astrakhan settlements of kalmyks, known as «home census»: and had purely local character. During registration fiduciary management systems to legitimize the order by which the Russian authorities to the state administration in the field had «reliable information on the number of tents or families of Kalmyk commoners, not making it a census or audit form», but over time it became obvious that in the absence of any census of the people it was impossible to have even approximately correct information, and because of this fact, as well as the problems and complaints from the Kalmyks to the errors in the taxation fees, the Ministry of State Property (MGI) approved in 1861, that the main caregiver K.I. Kostenkov would make lists of Kalmyk families. The same year they were compiled and tested they were checked and issued by a special commission with an official stamped kontramarka (voucher). Based on the designated last

number of the tent and belonging to each family of Kalmyk Ulus, genus and aimag. Management of Kalmyk people reports tend to reflect the data of the number of each class of Kalmyk, for higher class by number and capitation and commoners – by number of tents, and capitation.

Therefore the number of noyons throughout the second half of XIX century decreased, while the number of commoners during the same period increased. Only quantity of zaisangs remained fairly stable. In this regard, one can confirm that transformation of the social structure occurred, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

This milestone in the evolution of nomadic society became the Law on Exemption from the power of noyons and zaisangs approved in March 16, 1892. This reform freed commoners from mandatory duties in favor of the Kalmyk nobility and marked the scrapping of the traditional social structure. Although Kalmyks – commoners received civil rights of «free rural inhabitants» the authority and influence of the privileged class remained intact for a long time afterwards. In some encampments commoners still carried out duties in favor of noyons and zaisangs. Only in the XX century did Kalmyk commoners gradually shift away from smoldering discontent to active resistance. For example, the beginning of the XX century was remarkable for family noyons Tyumen because of the clash with Kalmyks of their own ulus Alexandrovski which was their possession for many years (the kalmyks settled or semi-settled on the Volga river island Shambai).

With the promulgation of the new law, it was stressed that noyons had no right to recover from the Kalmyk commoners any accumulated arrears for prior period Alban (kibitka tax) [17]. Since that time, the entire population of Kalmykia, including noyons and zaisangs were now taxed in favour of the state. The tax amount compared to previous charges had decreased significantly. The new tax was introduced as 6 roubles per tent (though the actual tax was usually in excess of 10 roubles). Kibitka (Kalmyk family) was used as a unit of taxation previously [18, p. 173].

Along with the traditional social groups the census showed the presence of Cossacks, peasants and townspeople in small quantities.

The 1892 reform led to the fact that all of the former taxable classes have become one big group, called – inorodtsy i.e. of different descent. According to the 1897 Census there were 120,254 *inorodtsy* i.e. of different descent (98.5% of total population). Analyses of documents suggests that the legislative term «inorodsty» referred to those categories of the Empire [19, p. 346; 13, p. 751], which did not classify them by national identity but rather by legal status within the legal and administrative system of the State. The

Brockhaus and Efron dictionary interprets this term as «some tribes mainly Mongolian, Turk and Finnish, which had a special treatment in terms of possession and self-administration» [21, p. 224].

An interesting fact is that according to the first general census of 1897 representatives of the merchant class are completely absent in Kalmyk Steppe [11, p. 2-3, 150-161]. This is probably due to the fact that in 1883, after the cancellation of the third guild, trade craft became available to all segments of the population [22, p. 532]. Thus, it is known that zaisang of Byudermis – Kyubetovsky aimag of the Bolshederbetovsky ulus Mr M. Polteev after 1892, being an enterprising man invested all his savings from Alban in trading business. He opened a large shop for fine trade goods, and in 1905 began selling industrial and food products and had two Kalmyk clerks. Gross profit from sales of textiles was 800 roubles per year. In 1910-1915 years Mr M. Polteev already had a stone house, two barns, wooden stables, three sheds, brick and tannery factories, a food store and a manufactured goods store.

Thus, since the introduction of the law dated 16 March 1892, which was very important because of the profound structural changes that had occurred in the Kalmyk society, noyons and zaisangs rights to charge their people with Alban canceled. Feudal dependence of Kalmyk commoners was eliminated. The law unified social structure and equated Kalmyk classes to Russian. Administration of the Kalmyk people was completely passed to the powers of Ulus Trustees and their assistants, and family communities were granted the right to elect managers from their own people.

1892 Reform completed a multi-year policy of the Russian State in relation to inorodtsy (different ethnic origin) i.e. feudal lords had been relegated to a position «rural inhabitants», along with the emancipation of the serfs. The tax-paying population of the Kalmyk steppe moved into the category of free rural inhabitants and only paid tribute to the state.

**Conclusions and suggestions.** Thus, the public policy aims of the Russian Empire in the XIX century was reflected in the Kalmyk people administration policies, consisted of the introduction of the Kalmyk steppe territory into a nationwide system of governance, which occurred by the authorization and incorporation. Established over a long period of time the social structure of Kalmyk society was used to improve management efficiency and to strengthen the administrative hierarchy until 1892, when traditional classes of Kalmyk society were finally eliminated. During the XIX century, the legal status of an individual transformed in accordance with Russian legislation, gradually equating to the all-Russian status.

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## **СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ СТРУКТУРА КАЛМЫЦКОГО ОБЩЕСТВА В XIX ВЕКЕ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ПРАВОВОГО СТАТУСА ЛИЧНОСТИ**

### **Аннотация**

Статья посвящена вопросам государственной политики Российской Империи в XIX в. на территории Калмыцкой степи, которая привела к изменению социального статуса традиционных сословных групп. Авторы делают вывод о том, что социальная структура калмыцкого общества, использовалась для повышения эффективности управления и для укрепления административной вертикали до 1892 г., когда окончательно были разрушены традиционные сословные институты калмыков.

**Ключевые слова:** социальная история, Калмыцкая степь, сословие, История России XIX в., История Калмыкии XIX в., внутренняя политика.