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## MUSLIM EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CONTEXT OF COLONIAL POWER: A SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* This article is dedicated to analysis the Muslim educational system in Central Asia with a focus on the Semirechye region in the context of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire. The study examines the transformation of traditional educational institutions, such as makhtabs and madrasahs, under the influence of imperial power. Special attention is paid to administrative measures aimed at their Russification, the introduction of imperial symbols, and normative control over the educational process. The article also analyzes the forms of resistance by the local population, including the development of the Jadidist movement as a reaction to the colonial educational policy. The relevance of the study is determined by the need to examine the role of educational policy in colonial governance mechanisms, as well as its impact on the cultural identity of the indigenous population. The Semirechye region, as a borderland area, was of particular interest to the imperial administration due to its geopolitical significance and cultural diversity. It was here that measures to limit the influence of Islam in the educational sphere became most repressive, making the region indicative for analyzing the overall policy of the Russian Empire in Central Asia. *Goals and objectives.* To identify the interconnections between colonial strategies and the transformation of the educational sphere in the Semirechye region. *Results.* The study explores key aspects: the normative regulation of Muslim schools, local resistance to the imposition of Russified curricula, the ideological justifications of colonial policy, and the role of educational institutions in preserving religious and cultural identity. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the detailed examination of the Semirechye region as a model example of colonial policy in education. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the study includes the analysis of archival materials, legal acts, and testimonies from local communities, which allows for reconstructing the complex interaction between colonial authorities and Muslim institutions. *Conclusion.* It should be mentioned that the educational policy of the Russian Empire, implemented in Semirechye, had a dual nature. On the one hand, it contributed to limiting religious influence in educational institutions, while on the other hand, it stimulated the formation of movements for the reform of Islamic education. Thus, the actions of the colonial administration not only undermined traditional institutions but also gave rise to new forms of cultural and educational resistance, which had a lasting impact on the social and cultural development of the region.



**Keywords:** Muslim education, colonial policy, Russification, Semirechye region, Jadidism, Russian Empire, cultural resistance

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**ОТАРЛЫҚ БІЛІК КОНТЕКСІНДЕГІ МҰСЫЛМАНДЫҚ БІЛІМ БЕРУ ЖҮЙЕСІ:  
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**Аңдатпа.** *Kipriche.* Бұл мақала Ресей империясының отарлық саясаты контекстінде Орталық Азиядағы мұсылмандық білім беру жүйесін, әсіресе Жетісу өңірін талдауға арналған. Зерттеу империялық биліктің әсерімен мектептер мен медреселер сияқты дәстүрлі білім беру институттарының трансформациясын қарастырады. Ерекше назар әкімшілік шараларға аударылған, олар білім беру жүйесінің орыстандырылуын, империялық символдарды енгізуді және оқу процесінің нормативті бақылауын көздеді. Сондай-ақ, жұмыста жергілікті халықтың қарсылығының тәсілдері, оның ішінде отарлық білім беру саясатына реакция ретінде жәдидтік қозғалысының дамуы талданады. Зерттеу өзектілігі отарлық басқару механизмдеріндегі білім беру саясатының рөлін, сондай-ақ оның жергілікті халықтың мәдени бірегейлігіне әсерін зерттеудің қажеттілігімен анықталады. Жетісу өңірі, шекаралық аймақ ретінде, империялық әкімшілік үшін геосаяси маңызы мен мәдени алуан түрлілігі тұрғысынан ерекше қызығушылық тудырды. Бұл жерде исламның білім беру саласындағы әсерін шектеуге бағытталған шаралар ең қатаң сипатқа ие болды, бұл өңірді Орталық Азиядағы Ресей империясының жалпы саясатын талдауда үлгі ретінде қарастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеу мақсаты – Жетісу өңірінде отарлық стратегиялар мен білім беру саласының трансформациясы арасындағы өзара байланыстарды анықтау. Жұмысқа негізгі аспектілер кіреді: мұсылмандық мектептердің нормативті реттелуі, жергілікті халықтың орыстандырылған оқу бағдарламаларын қабылдауға қарсы күресі, отарлық саясаттың идеологиялық негіздемелері, сондай-ақ білім беру институттарының діни және мәдени бірегейлікті сақтаудағы рөлі. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы Жетісу өңірін білім беру саласындағы отарлық саясаттың модельді мысалы ретінде жан-жақты қарастыруында. Зерттеу архивтік материалдарды, нормативтік-құқықтық актілерді және жергілікті қауымдастықтардың куәліктерін талдай отырып, отарлық билік пен мұсылман институттары арасындағы күрделі өзара әрекетті қайта құруға мүмкіндік береді. Қорытындылар Ресей империясының Жетісу өңіріндегі білім беру саясатының екіұшты сипатын көрсетеді. Бір жағынан, ол оқу орындарында діни ықпалды шектеуге көмектесті, екінші жағынан, исламдық білім беруді реформалау қозғалыстарының пайда болуына түрткі болды. Осылайша, отарлық әкімшіліктің әрекеттері тек дәстүрлі институттарды әлсіретіп қана қоймай, сонымен қатар жаңа мәдени және білім беру қарсылығы түрлерін тудырды, олар өңірдің әлеуметтік-мәдени дамуына ұзақ мерзімді әсер етті.

**Түйін сөздер:** Мұсылмандық білім беру, отарлық саясат, орыстандыру, Жетісу өңірі, жәдидизм, Ресей империясы, мәдени қарсылық

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## МУСУЛЬМАНСКАЯ СИСТЕМА ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ КОЛОНИАЛЬНОЙ ВЛАСТИ: НАУЧНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ СТРАТЕГИЙ И ИДЕОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* Статья посвящена анализу мусульманской системы образования в Центральной Азии с акцентом на Семиреченский регион в контексте колониальной политики Российской империи. Исследование рассматривает трансформацию традиционных образовательных институтов, таких как мектебы и медресе, под влиянием имперской власти. Особое внимание уделено административным мерам, направленным на их русификацию, введению имперских символов и нормативного контроля за учебным процессом. В работе также анализируются способы сопротивления местного населения, включая развитие джадидистского движения как реакции на колониальную образовательную политику. Актуальность исследования определяется необходимостью изучения роли образовательной политики в колониальных механизмах управления, а также ее влияния на культурную идентичность коренного населения. Семиреченский регион, как пограничная территория, представлял особый интерес для имперской администрации в силу своей геополитической значимости и культурного разнообразия. Именно здесь меры по ограничению влияния ислама в образовательной сфере приобрели наиболее репрессивный характер, что делает регион показательным для анализа общей политики Российской империи в Средней Азии. *Цель и задачи исследования* заключаются в выявлении взаимосвязей между колониальными стратегиями и трансформацией образовательной сферы в Семиреченском регионе. *Результаты.* В работе исследуются ключевые аспекты: нормативное регулирование мусульманских школ, сопротивление местного населения навязыванию русифицированных учебных программ, идеологические обоснования колониальной политики, а также роль образовательных институтов в сохранении религиозной и культурной идентичности. Научная новизна исследования заключается в детальном рассмотрении Семиреченского региона как модельного примера колониальной политики в сфере образования. Используя междисциплинарный подход, исследование включает анализ архивных материалов, нормативно-правовых актов, а также свидетельств местных сообществ, что позволяет реконструировать комплексное взаимодействие между колониальной властью и мусульманскими институтами. *Заключение.* Следует отметить, что образовательная политика Российской империи, реализуемая в Семиречье, имела двойственную природу. С одной стороны, она способствовала ограничению религиозного влияния в учебных заведениях, с другой она стимулировала формирование движений за реформирование исламского образования. Таким образом, действия колониальной администрации не только подрывали традиционные институты, но и порождали новые формы культурного и образовательного сопротивления, которые оказали долговременное влияние на социально-культурное развитие региона.

**Ключевые слова:** Мусульманское образование, колониальная политика, русификация, Семиреченский регион, джадидизм, Российская империя, культурное сопротивление

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### Introduction

The formation and development of Muslim education in the Kazakh lands, particularly in the Zhetysu region, represents a complex process influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-political factors. In the pre-imperial period, Muslim educational institutions, such as makhtabs and madrasahs, were the foundation of the educational system and provided access to knowledge for a significant portion of the local population. Archival documents indicate that by the 1840s, a system of Muslim education had been established in the Lepsinsky district, which actively functioned and contributed to increasing literacy levels among the Kazakhs. According to data presented by researcher P.P. Rumyantsev, 6,265 people in the Kapal district received education, reflecting a high level of population engagement in educational activities. Such achievements underscore the importance of the Muslim educational tradition, which maintained its resilience even during the initial stages of Russian colonization (Materialy po obzledovaniu tuzemnogo, 1911: 306).

With the arrival of Russian rule in the region, the attitude towards Muslim education by the imperial administration was shaped by strategic considerations. The policy of religious tolerance, demonstrated during the early stages of colonization, was aimed at strengthening the empire's influence among the local elite and population. The state showed interest in maintaining religious stability by supporting the construction of mosques and madrasahs, as well as transferring the management of religious affairs to the Orenburg Mufti Office. Reports from officials repeatedly emphasized that support for Islam helped gain the trust of khans, sultans, and other influential figures. Thus, religious institutions and educational centers became tools of colonial policy aimed at the assimilation and control of the local population, which, in turn, facilitated the integration of Kazakh society into the administrative system of the Russian Empire (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 48280, P. 41).

However, despite the formal recognition and support of Muslim schools, the actual situation remained complex. The 1891 census in the Tokmak district revealed that the nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakhs made it difficult to determine the exact number of educational institutions and their students. This circumstance led to ambiguity in the assessments of the scale of educational activity. Reports mentioned that there were about 50 schools in the district with a population of 84, 522, indicating an insufficient coverage of the population by the educational system. At the same time, it was clear that Muslim schools continued to function even amid colonial instability, maintaining literacy levels and cultural development. This confirms their important role in preserving and transmitting the spiritual and cultural heritage in Kazakh society (CSA RK. F. 64., Inv. 1., C. 2674., P. 17).

The theoretical analysis of this phenomenon allows us to view Muslim education in the Semirechye region not only as a tool of religious influence but also as a means of shaping national consciousness and cultural identity. The use of concepts of the interaction between power and religion, as well as modernization theory, reveals the duality of the tsarist administration's attitude toward Muslim schools. On one hand, they contributed to social stability and the strengthening of imperial influence, while on the other hand, they became the core of resistance to assimilation and the loss of cultural autonomy (CSA RK. F. 64., Inv. 1., C. 2674., Pp. 5–7). The study of this aspect reveals the complexity of colonial policy and its impact on the development of the education system, demonstrating that Muslim educational institutions played a key role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening the social structure of Kazakh society.

The scholarly significance of this research is predicated on the critical role of Muslim education in the socio-cultural and educational transformation of Kazakh society, particularly under the colonial frameworks imposed by the Russian Empire. The interplay between religious and educational institutions and the imperial administration constitutes a pivotal axis in the construction of national identity, a process that remains highly pertinent in the contemporary scholarly discourse on the re-

examination of historical heritage. The study of Muslim educational systems in this context offers not only a nuanced understanding of their influence on literacy, intellectual development, and cultural practices among the Kazakh population, but also illuminates their function as bastions for the preservation of indigenous traditions amidst hegemonic political and cultural forces. The review of archival materials, including statistical data, institutional records, and historical accounts of Muslim schools in the Semirechye region, provides a more profound understanding of the mechanisms through which local communities navigated colonial subjugation, simultaneously adapting to and resisting imperial policies. This research extends its relevance beyond the domain of colonial history, intersecting with fields such as cultural anthropology, religious studies, and the historiography of education, where it contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the relationship between education and power structures in colonized societies.

The primary aim of this investigation is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the formation and evolution of the Muslim educational system in the Semirechye region, situated within the broader socio-economic and political changes ushered in by the Russian Empire's colonial dominion. To achieve this objective, the study is structured around several key tasks: first, to delineate the major historical phases in the establishment of Muslim education in the Kazakh territories and its entanglement with the diffusion of Islam; second, to examine the specificities of educational practices in the context of the Kazakh nomadic way of life, including the adaptation of religious pedagogies to semi-nomadic settings; third, to critically assess the repercussions of Russian imperial colonial policies on the development, institutionalization, and operational dynamics of Muslim schools; and fourth, to analyze the broader implications of these educational institutions in the formation of national consciousness, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the maintenance of communal cohesion under the pressures of imperialization. Addressing these objectives will not only contribute to a synthesis of historical experiences but will also broaden the intellectual scope of religious education's role in the intricate processes of socio-cultural transformation in traditional societies, particularly in contexts where external political and cultural forces exerted significant influence over indigenous educational paradigms. This research ultimately aims to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge on colonial education systems, with particular attention to the intersections of religion, ethnicity, and colonialism in the shaping of modern educational landscapes.

### **Materials and Methods of Research**

The study uses data from archival documents and scholarly works from the colonial period that shed light on the policies of the Russian Empire regarding Muslim education and religion in Kazakhstan. The primary sources are materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CSA RK) and the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan (SCA RU). These documents allow for a detailed reconstruction of the processes that occurred in the Semirechye region and highlight key aspects of the interaction between the colonial administration and the local population in the field of religious education (Yakovlev, Panarin, 1911: 106).

The policy of the tsarist administration towards Islam is clearly reflected in the actions of the first Governor-General of the Turkestan region, K.P. von Kaufman. He sought to minimize Muslim dissatisfaction with government measures, while at the same time preventing the strengthening of Islamic institutions in the region. In his letter of February 6, 1876, to the Minister of Public Education, Count D.A. Tolstoy, Kaufman emphasized the need to limit the dissemination of Muslim literature, which, in his opinion, could harm Russia's interests in Central Asia. This position demonstrates the duality of colonial policy, which aimed to control Islam while avoiding open conflict with the local population (CSA RU, F. 47, Inv. 1, C. 11, Pp. 2–3).

At the same time, the tsarist administration understood the importance of Islam as a unifying force for the Turkic peoples, which posed a threat to colonial ambitions. In 1868, a series of measures were adopted aimed at limiting the rights of the Muslim clergy: Muslim affairs were transferred from the jurisdiction of the Orenburg Muftiate to the civil administration, and the construction of mosques and madrasas was placed under strict control. This policy was accompanied by attempts to implement Christian missionary activities, as evidenced by the works of N.I. Ilminsky and N.P. Ostroumov, who



sought to prove the necessity of converting Kazakhs to Orthodoxy in order to strengthen Russia's political and cultural influence (CSA RK. F. 64, Inv. 1, C. 2674, P. 5).

Particular interest lies in the statements of Sh. Ualikhanov, who noted the gradual strengthening of Muslim traditions under the influence of Tatar and Central Asian spiritual leaders (Ualikhanov, 1985: 197). This trend was characteristic of the second half of the 19th century and caused concern among the colonial administration, which sought to exploit the specific religious beliefs of the Kazakhs for its own interests (Masevich, 1960: 387). Thus, the materials of the study not only reveal the nature of the relationship between the local population and the imperial power but also allow for an analysis of the contradictions in colonial policy in the religious and educational spheres (Ostroumov, 1886: 5–7).

The tsarist government viewed Islam as a major obstacle to the realization of its political goals. In the process of colonizing and russifying the borderlands of the empire, one of the strategies was to eliminate the Arabic script used by the Muslim peoples. Missionary scholars, such as N.I. Ilminsky and N.P. Ostrovsky, actively supported the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet instead of the Arabic script. N.I. Ilminsky, noting that Arabic writing was closely tied to Islam, argued that introducing the Russian alphabet among the Turkic peoples would simultaneously weaken their attachment to Islamic culture and promote conversion to Orthodoxy (Ilminsky, 1883: 17). Thus, the replacement of the Arabic script with Cyrillic was part of a broader policy aimed at weakening Islamic influence and russifying the Muslim peoples.

The shift to Cyrillic and the introduction of mandatory Russian language instruction in Muslim schools were components of a policy designed to suppress the traditional educational system of Muslim communities. In 1870, a regulation was introduced that required the mandatory teaching of the Russian language in Muslim educational institutions (Tsalikov, 1913: 93). This not only strengthened russification but also slowed the development of Muslim education, as literacy and knowledge based on the Arabic script were no longer considered sufficient for qualification. The Tsar imposed strict restrictions on the opening of madrasahs and schools, limiting the opportunity for Muslim children to receive an education unless their training met Russian educational standards (Ali, 1991: 16). These measures, on the one hand, contributed to deepening control over Muslim communities, while on the other hand, they undermined the cultural and religious traditions of the Muslim peoples (CSA RK. F. 25., Inv. 1., C. 3804., Pp. 41–42).

The methodology of this study is based on a comprehensive approach that includes the use of historical-archival methods, source analysis, and comparative research. Both domestic and foreign historical documents, archival materials, as well as works by Western authors addressing the issue of Muslim education within the context of the Russian Empire's colonial policy, are used in this study. Special attention is given to archival data from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as materials published in works dedicated to Russia's educational and cultural policies in Central Asia.

For the analysis of religious and educational policies of the Russian Empire, materials related to the activities of local and central authorities are utilized, including reports from officials, letters, decrees, and legislative acts such as those from 1867–1868 on the reorganization of religious institutions in Kazakhstan. Additionally, important emphasis is placed on the works of foreign authors, particularly studies on Russia's missionary activity in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Works by authors such as Charles Schreider and Robert C. Williams (Schreider, 2008: 112), as well as those on the history of education in Muslim countries and in Russia, including their influence on the processes of merging and assimilation in the region, serve as crucial sources for evaluating the Western interpretation of Muslim cultural and educational traditions under Russian colonial expansion (Williams, 2005: 234).

Moreover, the study draws on approaches used in postcolonial theory, which help to understand how the process of education was linked to the political and cultural strategies of the empire. The methodology of postcolonial analysis, which includes examining imperial impacts on the local population and their education, allows for an objective exploration of the influence of state policies on the transformation of traditional Islamic education under the Russian colonial regime.

## Discussion

During the administration of Governor-General K.P. von Kaufman in the Turkestan region, the principle of minimal interference in the affairs of traditional Muslim schools was upheld. His stance on Muslim educational institutions did not align with the directives of the Ministry of Public Education. In 1875, the government issued a decree transferring all Muslim educational institutions under the jurisdiction of local educational authorities. By 1879, the Ministry of Public Education issued instructions to school inspectors concerning the inspection of local schools (Kaufman, 1885: 397). However, Kaufman held a distinctive opinion: he believed that interference in the affairs of local Muslim educational institutions was unnecessary, as they would, in his view, decline on their own without external control. K.P. von Kaufman considered such a stance politically justified and deemed the involvement of Russian officials in the operations of madrasas and schools superfluous. He placed significant emphasis on the gradual displacement of Muslim schools and madrasas through the introduction of Russo-native schools into everyday life (CSA RU, F. 47, Inv. 1, C. 4989, P. 72).

In 1884, following the appointment of N.O. Rosenbach as Governor-General of the Turkestan region, a decision was made to establish a commission to examine the issue of Muslim propaganda among the nomadic peoples. The commission was led by the military Governor-General of the Syr-Darya region, N.I. Grodekov. The commission was tasked with investigating the situation and presenting its findings to the Governor-General. Despite attempts to interfere in the activities of Muslim educational institutions, the commission concluded that efforts should focus on studying the state of Muslim schools and subjecting them to «state control».

N.O. Rosenbach, like K.P. von Kaufman, advocated for cautious measures regarding Muslim educational institutions. In 1887, he submitted a comprehensive report to the Minister of Public Education, highlighting several critical points: Since the last report, literature in Arabic and Persian had begun arriving in Turkestan from India, posing a threat to Russian influence in the region; The reforms implemented in public education were ineffective and required adjustment, including the need to align the curricula of Muslim educational institutions with European standards; With the number of Muslim schools reportedly exceeding four thousand, there was a pressing need to introduce inspections to monitor their activities and ensure compliance with legal requirements (CSA RU, F. 2718, Inv. 1, C. 2193, P. 112).

In 1888, N.O. Rosenbach, in a letter to the Minister of Public Education, emphasized the necessity of appointing an inspector for Muslim educational institutions in the Turkestan region. In this letter, he reported that the region had 206 madrasas attended by approximately 49,000 Muslim children, 1,660 schools, and 4,000 teachers (mudarris) (CSA RU, F. 47, Inv. 1, C. 4989, P. 79). The letter from N.O. Rosenbach initiated a prolonged correspondence with the Minister of Public Education, lasting three years. In 1890, at Rosenbach's request, N.A. Nalivkin was appointed as the inspector of Muslim schools.

Following Nalivkin's appointment, the administration of the Turkestan region began exercising more active oversight of Muslim educational institutions. Nalivkin, who was well-versed in the region's history and Eastern languages, and an author of several scholarly works on Turkestan's history and teacher training manuals, undertook an investigation into the condition of Muslim schools. He visited several provinces and submitted a report on their state to the local authorities (CSA RU, F. 2718., Inv. 1, C. 2193, P. 114).

As an inspector, N.A. Nalivkin proposed the introduction of Russian language courses at madrasas and the adaptation of educational programs to align with state interests. However, during his six years in this position, the Russian language course was never implemented in Muslim educational institutions. The reform of Muslim schools was also not realized, and the position of inspector for Muslim schools was eventually abolished (CSA RK. F. 44, Inv. 1, C. 23030, P. 7).

Between 1882 and 1889, Muslim educational institutions in Jetysu, which was part of the Steppe Governor-Generalship, developed in close connection with educational institutions in the Turkestan region. Many mullahs (teachers) from the Syr-Darya, Ferghana, and Samarkand regions taught in these schools. Additionally, some schools employed mullahs who had received their

education in Eastern Turkestan (China) (CSA RK. F. 44, Inv. 1, C. 23030, P. 2). For instance, a mullah teaching at a Dungan school in Pishpek had studied in Kulja, while a mullah from Przhevalsk, teaching at the local Dungan school, had been educated in Urumqi. Mullahs from Eastern Turkestan, such as those from Kulja and Urumqi, also taught in Tatar schools, sometimes receiving monetary compensation for their work.

In the nomadic Kazakh volosts, the primary educators were Tatar mullahs, who often traveled alongside the nomadic Kazakhs. Local administrations referred to them as «nomadic mullahs». According to incomplete data from 1882, 281 nomadic mullahs were registered in Jetysu, teaching 4,608 Kazakh and Kyrgyz children (CSA RK. F. 44, Inv. 1, C. 48226, P. 54).

The system of Muslim educational institutions in Jetysu primarily consisted of elementary schools established at mosques and supported by the Tatar, Uyghur, Dungan, and Uzbek populations. However, there were no permanent schools among the Kazakhs. For instance, in the Lepsinsk district, there was a Muslim school for Kazakh children, where approximately 90 students aged 8 to 30 were enrolled. Among the students was even a 60-year-old man who aspired to learn the Quran. The school was taught by a Tatar mullah, H. Izmailov, who had received an education in Bukhara, Mecca, Medina, and Turkey and was considered one of the most respected Islamic teachers. He sought to impart a profound knowledge of Islamic culture to Kazakh children.

Kazakh children attended Tatar schools in the Jetysu region, while Kyrgyz children in the Przhevalsk and Pishpek districts studied in schools affiliated with Uzbek mosques. Generally, children from different Muslim communities studied together in the region's schools. However, this practice was not welcomed by the local administrative authorities.

The Russian Empire implemented a policy of dividing ethnic groups to prevent potential uprisings against its rule. Specifically, local authorities aimed to isolate Kazakhs and Kyrgyz from the spiritual influence of Tatars, ensuring their separation in educational institutions. In 1876, in Verny, the head of education in Jetysu expelled Kazakh children from a Tatar school and forbade them from returning. These actions by local authorities contradicted the legal norms of that era (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 48226., P. 685–686).

Local authorities continued this policy, as evidenced in 1879, when the head of the Kapal district, upon learning that Kyrgyz children were attending Muslim schools, expelled them, fearing that studying the Quran might foster anti-Russian sentiments. In response to this, on May 30, 1879, the military governor of the Jetysu region issued a confidential directive to district chiefs emphasizing the need for strict oversight of Kyrgyz children attending Muslim schools, expressing concerns that such education could lead to their transformation into Muslim missionaries (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 48226., P. 684).

Traditional Muslim schools, which served as an important tool for the spiritual and cultural consolidation of the local population, had a profound influence on preserving religious and cultural identity. However, in Soviet historiography, traditional educational institutions were often portrayed as centers of religious fanaticism and conservatism, which downplayed their role in uniting peoples in the struggle against colonial oppression. In reality, in the absence of developed capitalist relations in Turkestan, Islam became a crucial factor in fostering the cohesion of the local population (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 48226., P. 686).

Muslim schools in Turkestan at the end of the 19th century played an important role in the religious and cultural consolidation of local peoples. The unified structure of content and teaching methods contributed to strengthening the spiritual foundations and identity of Muslim communities. The Tsarist administration saw this as a serious threat to its colonial policy, considering the Islamic educational factor as unifying and potentially anti-colonial. Scholars and administrators of the time emphasized the danger of integrating tribes and peoples based on Islamic values, which motivated the development of policies to control and suppress Muslim education. Measures were taken to reduce the influence of madrasahs and schools, including undermining their economic base, strengthening bureaucratic barriers, and spreading negative propaganda about Muslim educational institutions (Saydbaev, 1978: 31).

The curricula of Muslim schools were primarily scholastic in nature. Education began with the study of the Arabic alphabet and the «Abjad» course, aimed at memorizing letter combinations without semantic content. Students then moved on to reading excerpts from the Quran («Haftiyak») and studying the basics of Sharia law. In some schools, particularly in larger centers, works by renowned Turkic poets such as Navoi, Bedil, and Fuzuli were also taught. However, secular subjects, including arithmetic, geography, and history, occupied a peripheral role in the educational system. The scope and quality of teaching these subjects were limited to basic arithmetic skills and fundamental knowledge of the surrounding world (Klimovich, 1936: 222).

The Tsarist administration, aiming to weaken the influence of Islamic education, imposed strict restrictions on the establishment of new schools, requiring the mandatory teaching of the Russian language. In some cases, existing educational institutions were closed for failing to meet these requirements. Special attention was given to the creation of Russian-native schools, which were seen as a means to counteract Muslim madrasahs. However, such initiatives often aroused distrust among the local population. The problems were exacerbated by a shortage of qualified teachers capable of working in bilingual educational settings. Despite the pressure, Muslim schools continued to be the primary educational institution in the region, especially among the settled population (Ostroumov, 1913: 27).

Statistical data from the late 19th century confirm the importance of Muslim schools in the educational system of Turkestan. For example, in 1886, there were 144 Muslim schools operating in the Semirechye region, with 3,340 boys and 1,504 girls enrolled. In addition, there were Tatar schools in Verny and Kapal, with 328 children attending. The total number of students in Muslim schools exceeded the enrollment figures for Russian and Russian-native schools, indicating the continued popularity of Islamic education (CSA RK. F. 90, Inv. 1, C. 494, Pp. 84–86). However, most schools faced significant financial difficulties due to limited funding and the destruction of the waqf system. In the long term, the policies of the imperial administration led to the weakening of the educational landscape for the Muslim peoples of the region, which had a profound impact on their cultural and religious development (Altynsarin, 1957: 242).

As early as 1885, the Governor-General of the Steppe Region issued a decree to close the Muslim schools attached to mosques unless Russian language instruction was introduced. For the existing schools, it was proposed to gradually implement Russian language teaching as soon as Muslim teachers who spoke Russian and had graduated from Russian schools became available. According to the Governor-General, such teachers should be affordable for the parents of Kazakh children, as graduates of Russian schools often remained unemployed and agreed to teach in Muslim schools for low wages. The acting military governor of the Zhetysay region, upon receiving this order, instructed the head of the Verny district to gather all the mullahs teaching in Muslim schools, as well as respected citizens. They were to be informed that the authorities' desire to introduce the Russian language into Muslim schools was motivated by good intentions – the aim was to teach Muslim children Russian-Kazakh literacy and skills that would benefit both them and society (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 952., Pp. 3–4).

On April 10, 1899, the regional military governor, General Lieutenant Ivanov, issued an order to the district chiefs and the police chief of Verny, instructing them to address matters related to Muslim schools with the mandatory inclusion of the Russian language. He also recommended warning the communities supporting these schools that no exceptions could be made to this rule. However, the military governor acknowledged that Russian schools, boarding schools, and institutions for Kazakh children were not yielding the desired results, and that the dissemination of Russian education among the indigenous population was progressing very slowly. He attributed this to the influence of Muslim educational institutions and the activity of mullahs, who continued to establish schools even among the nomadic Kazakhs, despite prohibitions (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 952., P. 2).

The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that many Muslim schools operated irregularly and lacked clear curricula. These schools opened in the fall and closed in the spring, functioning mostly during the winter. They did not have established lesson plans, schedules, or student



registration systems. Often, the teachers were local literate individuals who taught their own and neighboring children free of charge (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1, C. 952, P. 29). Mullas were compensated for their work in the form of food, clothing, or livestock, and only in rare cases were they paid in cash. For example, in the school of the Maldybai district, parents paid the teacher between 3 to 10 kopecks per week per student, and also regularly provided gifts known as "zhumalyk". The value of these gifts depended on the financial situation of the family (Sabitov, 1950: 22).

The challenges of student registration in nomadic schools were further complicated by the absence of official attendance logs and the fluctuating number of students, which depended on the conditions of the nomadic lifestyle. Additionally, the mullas did not adhere to strict regulations, making it difficult for the authorities to maintain control. As a result, despite the efforts of the imperial administration, Muslim schools continued to be an important element of the region's educational system, significantly influencing the preservation of cultural and religious traditions (CSA RU, F. 47., Inv. 1., C. 657., Pp. 3–5).

## Results

In the Zhetisu region, under the intervention of administrative authorities in the educational process, Russian language was introduced in some Muslim schools. For example, in a report from the head of the Przhevalsk district dated July 25, 1899, it was noted that two Uzbek schools in Przhevalsk had begun to teach Russian. At the same time, Dungans of the Marin district were obliged to send their children to a Russian school under the supervision of official Trusov. However, many Muslim schools, while officially reporting the presence of Russian language teachers, did not actually hire any. The Tatar school in the Przhevalsk district, which was closed in 1899 for refusing to teach Russian, was reopened after its administration made empty promises to comply with the requirements (CSA RK. F. 44., Inv. 1., C. 2472., P. 160).

Inspectors of public schools were excessively active in implementing the Russian language in Muslim educational institutions, which caused outrage among the local population. They frequently inspected the schools, which irritated the Muslims, and their actions were perceived as interference in religious life. Complaints about the inspectors' actions were sent to central authorities and even to the Minister of Public Education. One such complaint stated that the inspectors were strangers to the local population and did not earn the trust of the Muslims, being seen as a threat to their religion. The introduction of the Russian language in schools funded by the Muslims themselves was considered a violation of their rights (Gaspinskiy, 1991: 22–50).

The situation was further exacerbated by bans on foreign educational materials, which were seen as a threat to state interests. These restrictions hindered Muslims from acquiring accessible and quality books, which had previously been supplied from India and Egypt. Additional dissatisfaction was caused by inspections of schools under the pretext of sanitary and hygienic standards, which often led to their closure. Local residents viewed this as yet another tool of pressure. As a result, many Muslims lost trust in the inspectors and saw their actions as biased and hostile (CSA RU, F. 1., In. 31., C. 123., P. 8).

At the end of the 19th century, after the suppression of the Andijan uprising, Russian authorities intensified efforts to gather information about Muslim educational institutions. The Governor-General of Turkestan, Dukhovskiy, played a prominent role in this process, which involved the humiliation of religious figures and an increased control over educational activities. In his recommendations, he called for the creation of alternative Russian-native schools and evening courses. However, these measures were not fully implemented, and the Muslim population continued to prefer traditional educational institutions. Government intervention in educational processes exacerbated public discontent, creating tension and hindering the development of harmonious relations (Shokay, 1992: 120–121).

In 1899, Governor-General Dukhovskiy presented a report to the higher leadership titled «Islam in Turkestan.» The report emphasized the need to avoid harsh measures and instead focus on winning the hearts and minds of the local population. Among the proposals were the expansion of medical assistance to attract the population, the support of mixed marriages (between Russians and «natives»),

the weakening of the role of translators, and the complete translation of official documentation into Russian. The report also noted that in three key regions (Syrdarya, Fergana, and Samarkand), there were 5,246 Muslim schools and madrasas, which greatly outnumbered the 119 Russian educational institutions, as well as 11,964 mosques compared to just 42 Orthodox churches (CSA RU, F. 1., Inv. 32., C. 384., Pp. 1–9).

General-Governor Dukhovskiy's primary aim was to combat Islam, as he recognized that Islam posed an obstacle to the process of Russification. In 1898, he proposed to the Minister of War the registration of all Muslim schools in the region and their transfer to local administration control to introduce Russian culture. To demonstrate the power of the Russian Empire among the local population, lectures were organized, and inspectors of public schools were tasked with ensuring that portraits of the emperor were displayed in schools and madrasas. However, the population perceived this as an intrusion into their religion, and many schools refused to hang portraits, which was noted in the inspectors' reports. For instance, one report from the Lepsinsk district mentioned that students were more familiar with the rulers of Bukhara, Afghanistan, and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire than with the Russian emperor, which was seen as a threat to Russian policy (CSA RU, F. 1, Inv. 32., C. 383., P. 17).

In 1902, the Ministry of Public Education received a petition from Russian Muslims requesting support for Muslim educational institutions. The petition suggested that the oversight of schools be transferred from the inspectors of public schools, who lacked trust and respect among the local population, to authoritative representatives of the Muslim community. The following proposals were also put forward: the creation of a qualified commission to develop curricula; the inclusion of secular subjects, such as arithmetic, geography, and history, taught in the native language; the conduct of exams and issuance of certificates; and the provision of certain benefits to school graduates (Goldtsiger, 1912: 290).

These initiatives reflected the Muslim community's attempts to preserve its educational and cultural traditions amidst increasing pressure from the authorities. However, many of the proposals remained unimplemented, and the policy of controlling Muslim schools and madrasas continued to cause tension and dissatisfaction among the local population. The authorities' persistent interference with religious and educational practices was seen as a threat to the community's identity, deepening the rift between the local population and the Russian administration (CSA RU, F. 47., Inv. 1., C. 657., Pp. 9–10).

The proposal aimed at reforming the educational system within Muslim institutions, despite being presented with ostensibly progressive intentions, was met with opposition from both the Ministry of Public Education and local administrative authorities. In response to the proposal, the Minister of Education sought the opinion of the Governor-General of Turkestan. However, the feedback was not provided directly by the Governor-General, but rather by Nalivkin, a high-ranking official. Nalivkin's conclusion articulated concerns that implementing the proposed reforms would facilitate the isolation of Muslim communities, which, in turn, might foster the rise of "pan-Islamism". This response underscores the imperial government's reactionary approach to Muslim educational reforms, framing them as a potential threat to the consolidation of imperial authority. The government's reluctance to endorse such reforms reveals the complex interplay between educational policy, religious control, and imperial strategies for maintaining dominance over diverse ethnic and religious groups within the Russian Empire.

The reactionary stance of the tsarist administration toward Muslim educational institutions was intrinsically linked to broader political objectives that sought to solidify the territorial integrity of the Russian Empire through the process of Russification. This policy was explicitly aimed at eradicating non-Russian cultural and religious identities, including those of the Kazakhs, while enforcing a dominant Russian cultural framework. The tsarist government's systematic obstruction of the growth and development of Muslim education had far-reaching consequences, not only for the residents of Zhetysay but also for the wider Turkic and Muslim populations under imperial rule. These policies severely undermined the capacity of these communities to maintain and develop their own cultural and national identities over time, presenting a direct challenge to the preservation of their religious,

social, and educational traditions. The government's insistence on maintaining a rigid, scholastic approach within Muslim schools and madrasahs, coupled with the suppression of more dynamic pedagogical models, further deepened the marginalization of these institutions and stifled their ability to adapt to the changing educational needs of the communities they served.

Despite the colonial pressures exerted by the tsarist regime, the government failed to recognize the emergence of a transformative movement that sought to modernize Muslim educational institutions to meet contemporary needs. This movement, known as Jadidism, represented a significant intellectual and cultural force within the Muslim community. Advocating for the modernization of educational practices, Jadidism called for the incorporation of new pedagogical methods, as well as a broader curriculum that would include secular subjects alongside religious teachings. This movement sought to reconcile Islamic values with the demands of modernity, emphasizing the importance of scientific knowledge, critical thinking, and social progress. By promoting a more progressive and inclusive educational model, the Jadidists aimed to empower Muslim communities to overcome the constraints imposed by colonial and traditional educational systems, positioning Muslim education as a dynamic agent of cultural and social transformation.

### **Conclusion**

The Muslim educational system in Zhetysay and other regions of Turkestan at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries played a significant role in preserving the religious and cultural identity of local populations. However, it faced numerous obstacles from the tsarist administration, which sought to control, limit, and adapt Muslim education in accordance with the imperial policy of Russification. Interference from the authorities, such as the introduction of the Russian language in schools, the destruction of the waqf system, and the prohibition of foreign educational materials, was perceived by the local population as a threat to their cultural independence. The tsarist administration aimed to displace traditional educational institutions by creating Russian-native schools and imposing Russian-language education. However, despite this pressure, Muslim schools continued to be an essential part of the educational and cultural life of the region.

As a result, despite the harsh measures, most Muslim educational institutions remained within the framework of traditional Islamic education, indicating a high level of trust from the local population in these institutions. Interference from inspectors and the demands to introduce the Russian language provoked outrage among Muslims, as evidenced by numerous complaints about the actions of the authorities, which were seen as an intrusion into religious and cultural life. Although these measures served as instruments of Russification, they did not completely suppress traditional educational practices, and Muslim educational establishments remained centers of religious and cultural identity for the local people.

Tsarist policy regarding Muslim educational institutions demonstrated a clear intention to strengthen the integrity and dominance of the Russian Empire through Russification, which hindered the evolutionary development of Muslim education. However, in response to the pressure from the authorities, a force emerged that sought to transform the educational system—the Jadidism movement. This movement represented an attempt to adapt Muslim educational institutions to modern requirements, while maintaining the core principles of Islamic education. Thus, despite significant resistance, the development of Jadidism became an important step toward modernizing Muslim educational traditions within the Russian Empire.

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