

Problems in Studying the History of the Economic-cultural Mastery of South Balkhash during the Second Half of the 2nd Millennium

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South Balkhash, or Semirechie, occupies a vast geographic space in inner Eurasia. For many centuries until the mid-18th century, it was a gigantic transit corridor, serving regular migrations of multiple nomadic hordes from the abyssal regions of Central Asia towards the north and northwest of the continent. Migrating through the continent, large nomadic groups were accommodated in Semirechie, and came into close contact with local nomadic and sedentary tribes, playing an important role in the development of the culture and history of the region.

The south region differs from the Northeast Aral and Central Kazakhstan in its wide variety of natural landscapes. There are three main landscape zones in the area:

- *arid deserts*, immediately adjacent to the southern and western shores of Balkhash (deserts Sary'yesik'atrau, Taukum, Chu-Ili Mountains);
- *piedmont woody semi-deserts* (piedmonts of the Zailisky Alatau range and the Djungarsky Alatau, inter-mountainous depressions Kegen, Zhalanash, Tekes and other);
- *mountains with vertical belting*, e.g. Zailisky and Djungarsky Alatau, Uzynkara (Ketmen), Kungei Alatau and a small piece of the north slopes of the Terskei Alatau range.

In the historical past, some special types of the distribution of population, life style and ways of utilization of natural resources were characteristic to each zone. The mode and span of area utilization for economic, social, and cultural purposes were shaped by the economic, migrational and confessional policy of certain states, which occupied Semirechie during certain periods. We distinguish six periods in the last 500 years in the history of the economic-cultural mastery of the South Balkhash landscape zones.

A major criterion for distinction are the geopolitical factors expressed in the change of subjects of possession and management, dynamics and vectors of migration processes, in the change of the ethnographic composition of the local population and the resulting discrepancies in modes and degree of utilization of water and vegetation resources by different ethnic-cultural groups.

With the help of these indicators, we will monitor the following historical periods:

1. Emergence and development of the Kazak khanate, second half of 15th to the 16th century.
2. The Djungar khanate, 17th to the mid 18th century.
3. The Kazak "reconquista", 1758–1814.
4. The socio-economic life of the Semirechie Kazaks under the Kokand khanate, 1815–1852.
5. The conquest of southeast Kazakhstan by Russia and its historical development within the geopolitical space of the Russian Empire, 1853–1917.

6. The Soviet period, 1920–1992.

The study of the first three periods is substantially hindered by the utmost scarcity of relevant written sources and the available sources being scattered in foreign archives. This hinders the possibility of revealing the main laws of the people's interaction with nature during many centuries of history; hence, it is necessary to find and involve various cartographic, historical-toponymic, archaeological, ethnographic, folklore, genealogic and other materials in the scientific research, in order to make a synthesis which would allow the production of a complete and multi-dimensional picture.

The first period (second half of the 15th till the 16th century) includes the history of abandoning the North and Central Kazakhstan by part of nomadic Turkic-speaking tribes headed by the sultans Kerei and Janibek to West Semirechie and the establishment of a new polity of nomads - the Kazak khanate - in 1465 together with the further expansion to the inner Eurasian continent (1465-1598).

The Kazak khanate had emerged in the area of the Chu-Talas interfluve, sites of Chu and Kozybashi; and in the beginning, occupied a relatively small part of Semirechie, its adjacent steppes and the semi-desert landscapes of Central Kazakhstan and the lower Syrdaria. By the end of the XVI century, thanks to the pragmatic and consistent outer policy of the Kazak khans, their territory now covered the whole Chu-Ili region and the northern parts of East Semirechie extending down to the lake of Alakol. At the same time, the piedmonts and the mountainous belt belonged to Mogolistan, or Kashgaria, which included the sedentary and nomadic groups of local Turkic-speaking tribes [1].

The population of the Kazak khanate consisted of the steppe Turkic-speaking Kazak nomad tribes, traditionally occupied with pasturing livestock. The Kazak nomadic society was formed on a genealogic principle out of three large tribal groupings (the Juz): the Senior juz, the Middle juz and the Junior juz. The juzes were subdivided into generations and tribes (families). Historically, the area of the North Semirechie, from the Chu River in the west to Lake Alakol in the east, and from Lake Balkhash in the north to Zailisky and Djungarsky Alatau in the south was a settlement areal of the Senior Juz. This Juz included large genealogic groups, namely: the Jala'ir, Dulat, Sary Uisun, Alban, Suan, Shaprashty, Oshakty and Ysty, and was subdivided into smaller kin groups. Each of them owned appropriated seasonal pastures, and each year they moved from one pasture to another following strictly regulated routes [2].

During their year-round pasturage, the Kazak nomads systematically utilised four types of pastures: winter (kystau), spring (kokteu), summer (jailau) and autumn (kuzeu), each of which differed in seasonal temperatures and vegetation for feed crops. To pass from winter pastures to spring and summer pastures, and then from the summer ones to autumn and winter pastures, the Semirechie nomads practiced meridian, radial and vertical modes of migration. The first two were spread mostly in the Chu-Ili mountainous and low-hill massif, where the Kazaks wrangled in winter and summer time on the slopes and gorges of small mountains, and on the piedmonts in the spring and autumn. The third type of migration was chiefly characteristic of those Kazaks groups which traditionally moved in the high mountain ranges and foothills. In the winter and early spring they roamed on the plains, in the piedmont valleys or on the extensive Balkhash deserts of Taukum and Sary'esik'atrau, and in the late autumn and winter they climbed the mountains of Jaili and Zailisky Alatau, Uzynkara

(Ketmen), Kungei Alatau and others [3].

As a rule, all steppe nomads followed the principle of the zonal-seasonal cycle and highly valued the winter pastures – kystau - where they settled for the longest period of the year, about 4 to 5 months. The winter season was the most extreme period with the lowest temperatures, forceful winds, repeated ice-slicks and snow storms. At this time of the year, the economic value of surrounding landscapes which could preserve and feed the livestock rose sharply.

The most favourable for winter stock-keeping were those pastures providing fresh water with a constant water flow, abundant stands of grass and natural protection from the winds and foul weather. We should bear in mind that the nomads of the Chu-Ili Mountains and the vast sand deserts of Taukum and Sary-esik-atrau had to constantly endure major shortages in water resources and productive pasture lands under the extreme climatic conditions of arid inner continental Eurasia.

For normal grazing, the pasturage radius, centred at the watering place, should not exceed: 8 – 10 km for camels, 4 – 5 km for sheep, and 2 – 2.5 km for cattle [4]. In North Semirechie, the winter and summer migrations were following rivers, such as the Chu with its tributaries: Zhyngyldy, Kopalay, Sarybulak and Ashisu in the area of the Chu–Ili Mountains; the Ili and Karatal Rivers with their tributaries and the water basin of Aksu, Lepsy and Emel in the east of the region, etc. Normally, the nomads in Semirechie did not go too far away from rivers.

Thanks to their optimal life conditions and their long stay at the kystau, the Kazaks could occupy themselves with crafts, undertake construction in the winter area (constructing adobe or stone enclosures, stationary dwellings, wells, etc.) and execute rites and important social rituals. It is not by chance that they buried their kin at the kystau, which in time were transformed into big necropolises; because of great importance of the winter pastures. The Kazaks thoroughly guarded them against possible encroachment by remote kin or foreign neighbours. The winter camps drew the eye of the Mongol-speaking Oyrat nomads when they attempted the conquest of Semirechie in first half of the 17th century, and two centuries later under the Kokand khanate (1809–1876).

Both states strived to seize and secure for themselves the winter pastures of Kazaks and Kyrgyz: for there they could station their military troops and frontier guards and construct reinforced structures of stone or adobe. Upon the seizure of the most fertile lands with ample water supplies by the Oyrats, all the Kazak tribes that traditionally roamed in the north part of Semirechie, had to move far west of Kazakhstan. Based on that, it follows that the stationed outposts of the Oyrats, and later of the Kokand nobility, represented not only the local control-observation points but also the base for the strategic military and economic domination of the Djungar and the Kokand khanates over large pasture areas. Thus, the seizure of winter pastures by neighbouring tribes/ by large, predetermined eventual success of territorial claims by these invaders to the whole area of year-round migrations of the former possessors [5].

The history of the Kazak khanate from the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century is poorly recorded in written Persian- and Turkic-language sources of the period. In addition, they contain almost no information on the socio-economic life of the Kazak nomads. The study of the problem is further complicated by a lack of information regarding the immovable nomadic monuments and the sedentary population of medieval Semirechie. All of that prevents us from getting a

clear picture of the degree to which the various landscape zones of the region were populated and the character of their economic-cultural development prior to the conquest of the Ili River basin by the West Mongols.

The second period, 17th mid-18th century, encompasses an epoch of a long stay by the Mongol-speaking Oyrats nomads in the region, who established their own nomad state, the Djungar khanate in 1635. It is characterized by the large-scale migrations of the Oyrat tribes from the Mongol Altai and the basin of the Ili River to South Balkhash and further to the north and northwest of Kazakhstan.

In first quarter of the 17th century, the Oyrats seized the Djungarsky Alatau and adjacent desert plains to the east of the valley of the mid- and lower Ili River. In the period from 1635–1658, the Djungar khans spread their power to all of the left bank of the Ili River basin, to the area of the Chu-Ili Mountains and the Chu-Talas interfluvium up to the lower Talas River and the west bank of Balkhash. Because of the military victory of the Oyrat princes over the Kazak khans and the following mass move of the Oyrat tribes to Semirechie, its population consisting of the Kazak tribes of the Senior juz had to leave their pastures and migrate to the left bank of the Talas and to the northern foothills of the Karatau range [6]. The major outcome of the war and the migration processes in Semirechie were cardinal changes in the subjects of control and the use of natural resources, which shaped the new way of mastering the piedmont and arid landscapes of the region.

From the 17th century till the middle of the 18th century, the main inhabitants of South Balkhash were the Oyrats, who, like the Kazaks, practiced seasonal pasturage and similar modes of year-round migrations, based on the topography and characteristics of Semirechie nature and climate. Additionally, the Kazak and Oyrat societies had similar social structures built on a strict genealogical hierarchy of composite “Senior” and “Junior” families and tribes. The difference was in a more centralized political organization in the Oyrat society, prepared by the conquest in 1678 by the Djungar khanate of South Mogolistan, or Kashgaria, and the consequent assimilation of its people and economical and cultural sedentary traditions for establishing local authorities in the subdued regions. This can be seen in particular, in the Djungar system with the creation of fixed checkpoints on the outer frontiers of the nomadic area of the Oyrats, and inside the khanate itself. The practice of the Oyrat nobility to use Uighurs and Sarts, forcefully resettled from Kashgaria and the Syrdaria region, for the construction of defense installations and Lamaist temples is another example of the higher degree of centralization and consequent assimilation [7].

The Oyrat nomadic state, in comparison with the Kazak khanate and other polities of Eurasian nomads, had a hierarchic system of Buddhist religious-cultic centers, which began to form in the first half of the 17th century. A network of Lamaist centers of “yellow cap” Gelugpa school (sume) functioned in the Djungar khanate, in tight liaison with each other and the main Tibet religious centers for about 130 years. They were chiefly located at the winter and summer camps of the Oyrat princes, at healing sources and the transit crossroads. They implemented the ideological function for the social integration of the Oyrats and spread spiritual Buddhist values. The Oyrat monasteries, sume, as a rule, had small settlements of kashgarian Sarts and Uighurs who grew crops on temple lands for the Buddhist monks, made handicrafts and built cultic and irrigation structures. These were local centers which supported translations and the creative and spiritual life of the various Oyrat

local groups. In essence, they were the only centers of sedentary culture in Semirechie from the 17th century until the middle of the 18th century [8].

The Djungar historical period of mastering nature in the South Balkhash is somewhat better recorded than the preceding historical epoch. Very important evidence of the spatial distribution of Oyrats and steppe camps of Oyrat nobility is in the historical biography “The moon light. A history of rabdjan Zaya-pandit” written at the end of the XVII century by a student of a famous Oyrat enlightener, Radnabhadra [9]. Similar information is found in the Chinese historical-geographical works of the Ch’ing Empire, “Jinding huangyu xiyu tuzhi”, “Dai Qing shengzu renhuangdi shilu”, and several others, written during the mid-XVIII – first quarter of the XIX centuries [10]. An important addition to the above are the materials of Russian envoys to the Djungar khanate during the XVII – mid-XVIII centuries; in particular, the thematic chronological magazines by I. Unkovsky, L. Ugrimov and K. Miller from 1722–1743, which contain valuable data on the geographic location of a number of seasonal camps of the ruling Oyrat elite, the stationed Djungar outposts and the Lamaist sume [11]. The historical toponymic data of 10-versta-maps from the beginning of the XX century for four uyezds: Verny, Djarkentsky, Kopalsky and Lapsinsky [12] and large-scale maps drawn in the past 50–60 years helped ascertain these small locations. Ruins of former Djungar fortifications and temples are normally titled by names such as “Kalmak”, “Kalmaktobe”, “Kalmakkorgan”, “Karaultobe”, “Karaulshoky” which reflect the laconic oral folk memory of the Kazaks regarding their past functional purposes and the exterior profiles of the historical places [13].

The Oyrat camping grounds in South Balkhash were unevenly distant from the outer frontiers of the Djungar khanate. Those parts of the khanate that were properly secured against sudden armed raiders by a network of relatively frequent steppe streams and large bodies of water, such as the Balkhash and Alakol lakes were the most densely populated and developed by Oyrat nomads. This is why the boundaries of the Oyrat natural land estates in Northeast Semirechie mainly coincided with their regular roaming areas. The situation was different in the northwest part of the region, varying significantly from the left bank part of the Ili River basin because of the geographical conditions.

The presence of the Djungar in the region for over a century was reflected in the irregular character of land utilisation for stock-raising. Written sources from the second half of the 17th till the middle of the 18th century clearly indicate that the camping grounds of the Oyrat families and tribes were concentrated mainly on the left bank of the middle and upper Ili River (urga), which provided abundant fresh water and rich vegetation, rather than in the desert band of pasture lands adjacent to Balkhash and the south edge of Betpakdala. The mountain slopes and foothills of the Kyrgyzsky Range, ZailiskyAlatau, Uzynkara (Ketmen) and northern Tian Shan were constant locations for Oyrat summer camps. Adjacent flat parts of the Taukum deserts, the middle and upper Ili River valley with numerous tributaries - from the Khorgos River to the Kurty River, the Chu River valley and its upper tributaries - were their winter camps. Numerous documents, archaeological and historical-toponymic materials of the epoch, published by Kazakhstan scientific editions in various years, are illustrative to the long presence of the Djungars here.

Unlike the south and central parts of Semirechie, desert landscapes of the Chu-Ili Mountains extended from the south to the north, from the Kurty River (a tributary to the Ili River) and the Chu River to the southwest shore of Lake Balkhash. It remained scarcely populated during the whole

period of the Djungar domination in Semirechie and out of use by Oyrat nomads. These lands, which were the buffer zone of the Djungar khanate, were a poor economic and cultural area that separated the main areal of the Oyrat tribal areal from the camping grounds of Kazak tribes. At the time, only a network of Djungar military-defensive posts was positioned there to control transit migratory routes from Betpakdala to the upper Ili [14]. The Djungar khunaidji Tsevan-Rabdan wanted to strengthen his military-political control over the acquired territories of west Semirechie and the nomadic transit and caravan routes that were running there (from the Volga region to Syrdaria steppes, Central Asia and China). At the end of 1790s, he therefore moved his headquarters from south Tarbagatai (winter camp) and Djungarsky Alatau (summer camp) to the upper Ili Valley and its tributaries Sharyn and Khorgos, and to the Tekes River valley.

During the winter periods, the urga of Tsevan-Rabdan, and later that of his son and successor Galdan-Tseren, usually migrated to the lower Khorgos and the left bank side of Ili from the so-called Keretsk crossing and Kozheger place (Kadjiger, Kodjiger, Kotsheger, Khadjiger, etc.) to the mouth of the left tributary of the Sharyn River from November to the end of March. Next, the Khan family headed to the spring camping ground upstream located along the right side of the Sharyn River up to the mouth of the Temirlik River where they roamed from April to the end of May, which was the period when snow rapidly melted in the surrounding mountains. At the beginning of summer, the urga moved to the mountainous gorges, to the south and southeast slopes of the Uzynkara range (Ketmen); the valleys of Kegen, Karkara, Tyup, Zhergalan, Zergess, Tekes, Sumbeh (Alban, Alban-Shibir Albanashba–Kazakhstan) and along the right tributary of Tekes and the Ili River up to its confluence with the Khorgos River. In the upper course of the Khorgos River the year-round cycle of migration of the ruling Choros clan ended in early November [15].

The new camps had more favourable advantages for the “big urga” than all the previous seasonal camps of Oyrat high rulers due to their locations and natural climatic conditions which allowed them to complete the whole round of migration within a relatively small area. Starting from the Tsevan-Rabdan on, the area became a usual place for winter and summer camping for all of the Djungar khans who kept the throne until the time of destruction of the Djungar khanate and its depopulation by the Ch’in army. The area was a densely populated migration areal of the Oyrat nomad tribes up to mid-XVIII century.

Unlike the economic life of the Oyrat families and tribes in the arid zone of South Balkhash, which were described in detail in documents and historical-toponymic materials, the specific features of their development of the piedmont landscapes and mountains of South Semirechie was a difficult problem until recent times. .

A lack of written sources on the history and culture of southeast Kazakhstan, together with the absence and later inaccessibility for Soviet scientists of large-scale geographic maps prevented proper scientific research.

The most representative information source is the famous Djungaria map by J. G. Renat, compiled in 1734–1738 based on the so-called “The Kalmyk map” of the Djungar khan Galdan-Tseren. The majority of researchers know it only as the poor black and white copies published in Russia in 1881 and in Germany in 1911. The full-colour original has since a long time been kept in in the

Manuscript Fund at the Uppsala University Library in Sweden [16]. Thanks to the kind help shown to us by Norwegian and Swedish colleagues, the Archive of the Kazak Scientific Research Institute on Problems of Nomadic Cultural Heritage now has an electronic copy of the Swedish original map by J.-G. Renat in its possession. It clearly shows all the Oyrat geographic names in Latin transliteration, as well as a caption for the winter camps of Djungar khans and other Oyrat stations.

Special symbols, talters (triangles with a vertical hyphen within from its base to the middle indicating an entry), denote the lamaist monasteries and temples on the map. The 65 cult structures spread throughout the Djungar khanate were indicated on the map: 40 of them are in present day Kazakhstan; 7 in Kyrgyzstan; and 18 in the Sinkiang Uygur Autonomous Region (SUAR) of China. The maximum number of Lamaist sites - 27 monasteries and single temples - were available in the migration area of the Djungar khans' urga in the Ili River left side valley or to the east from its tributary Shelek to the mouth of Khorgos, in the basins of Temirlik and Kegen (with its left tributary Karkara), Tekes, Narynkol and around the Lake Issyk-Kul. According to J.-G. Renat's map, in 1733 there were 43 Lamaist complexes in Semirechie, which were the only sources of sedentary farming culture in the region.

It is known that the J.-G. Renat's map is of varying scale: predominantly 1:7,000,000 m in the centre and less than 1:10,000,000 m in the periphery [17]. This prevents the calculation of even the approximate longitudes and latitudes for the cultic structures. However, this shortfall is offset by the large amount of information contained in the map in the form of the accurate outlines of the mountain foothills and valleys with meandering rivers, which attracted the Oyrat Lamaist complexes.

For the successful localisation of prospective sites of Lamaist talters (according to Renat's terminology) in southeast Kazakhstan we have used two methods. Firstly by the visual juxtaposition of mountains and rivers indicated on the Renat map with similar contours of mountains and river valleys on recent maps of Semirechie. Secondly, by comparing previous Oyrat names of various natural objects with earlier or later Kazak historical toponyms, by a principle of similar transliteration and semantics. A 2008 exploration of the sites established that the Lamaist sanctuaries were located in the open at the foothills of high mountain ranges or in the piedmont valleys. They were situated on lands with abundant vegetation near rivers, healing mineral water sources, or stable streams. They lay along main migration and caravan routes, as well as at river crossings, mountain passes and other nodal points of trans-regional nomadic roads. Their locations were chosen to allow the Lama teachers to easily communicate the teachings of the Gelugpa school to the largest number of believers.

The monasteries and adjacent agrarian settlements populated with Sarts and Uighurs, numbered from tens of people to 200-300. The Sarts and Uighurs constructed buildings, water collectors and irrigation systems. The set-up and lasting functioning of such centres for irrigated agriculture and sedentary culture in the piedmonts of Djungar Alatau and in the upper Ili River basin during the mid 17th century and the first half of the 18th century had been confirmed in the numerous historical records of the time and later periods. It had also been verified through the field survey of the southern region conducted by officials of the Turkestan military district and the Semirechie oblast administration during 1870s – 1890s.

This information provides evidence of the existence of a developed practice of land use in the piedmont zone and the low belts of the Kyrgyz range, Zailisky and Djungarsky Alatau, and northern Tian Shan under Djungar domination. It also indicates that there was very little utilization of the land by the Oyrats for sedentary agriculture.

The third period of economic-cultural mastery of the region began in 1758 with the historical date of the total destruction of the Djungar khanate by the Manchu army and ended in 1815 with the adoption by Adili-Khan (d.1815), ruler of the Semirechie Kazaks, of the patronage of the Kokand khanate. In the 1750s the escalation of war between the Djungar and the Ch'in army let the Kazaks return to their old pastures which had been abandoned by their enemies, and by 1763 they had reclaimed much of the lands of the mid- and lower Ili River basin and its tributaries, as well as other river valleys in Northeast Semirechie [18].

The population of North Tian Shan by Kazak nomads during the second half of 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, was complicated by the activity of the Ch'in administration, which put in place a network of frontier fortresses and outposts, and adopted various military-administrative measures to stop the migration of Kazak tribes to the Ili territories.

Chinese fortresses and pickets were generally set up at the sites of the former winter and summer camps of the Oyrat nobility, which had the vegetation necessary for settlement life and fresh water available for the development of irrigated farming. As a rule, there were Oyrat cult sites and Sart villages in their vicinity. The newly emerged agrarian towns of Sarts and Uighurs continued to be occupied with farming. This information is reflected in the materials of the well-known European traveller and Kazakhstan researcher, I-P. Falk, which were published in 1776 and in travel notes by Russian merchants later on. Thus, during the period under consideration, the Kazak tribal groups did not have free access to the south piedmont zone of Djungarsky Alatau and the low belts of the North Tian Shan range and therefore had to frequently change their pasture lands in these areas.

The fourth period from 1815 to 1853 was an epoch of political domination of the Kokand khanate in Semirechie. They seized the Chu Valley, the piedmonts of the Kyrgyz range and Zailisky Alatau; built large fortifications and defensive outposts, e.g. the fortresses of Tokmak, Pishpek, Aksu, Shishtobe, Tauchubek, Merke, Kastek, Ush-Almaty and Itkichu, as bases for sending tax collectors and punitive squadrons to the camping grounds of the Kyrgyz and Kazaks of the Senior Juz. The Kokand fortifications were located at the winter camps of the traditional Semirechie nomads in order to exercise strategic control over large territories. The extreme northern Kokand outpost in Semirechie was a fortification named Itkichu, located at the mouth of the Kuragaty River into Chu. All other fortifications were located in the piedmonts of the Kyrgyzsky range and the Zailisky Alatau, which were the richest in fresh water sources. In the mid-19th century, their garrisons numbered between 50 to 250 occupants, not including the farmers because they were provided with bread, rice and other foodstuffs by the semi-sedentary Kyrgyz of Fergana and from the large military-administrative centers of the Kokand khanate.

At the time, the Kazaks of the Senior Juz had only their seasonal pastures to the north from the lower Chu River and to the northwest from the Djungarsky Alatau. Their main economic occupation continued to be the migratory raising of livestock as best they could in the northern part of

South Balkhash with its scarce water and scanty vegetation.

The history of economic-cultural life of Semirechie nomadic and sedentary population during first half of 19th century was erratically mentioned in passing in Russian documents and the Kokand narrative sources of the time, such as the “**Tarih-i-Shahruhi**” by mullah Niyaz-Muhammad Hukandi, “**Tarih-i-djadida-yi Tashkand**” by Muhammad-Salih and others. They focused mainly on the military-administrative events inside the Kokand khanate and its nomadic periphery. Writings concerning the traditional economy of the local nomads and sedentary farmers in the region of Zailisky Alatau and the Kyrgyzsky range are fragmentary and fail to deliver a clear picture.

The fifth period, 1850s till the beginning of the 20th century, has the most historical records. It was an epoch of the conquest of Semirechie by Tsarist Russia with almost 70 years of development under the imperial administrative-political system. The locations of Kazaks of the Senior Juz and Kyrgyz in the region were dependent on the agrarian and migrational policies of the Russian empire and its administrative-territorial management system.

In 1868, all of the Semirechie population was subdued by the Russian colonial authorities and became part of the Semirechie oblast, which consisted of the Verny, Pishpeksky, Kopalsky, Djarkentsky and Sergiopolsky uyezds (large administrative district). The uyezds were subdivided into volosts (rural district). Each volost’ corresponded to certain pasture holdings in common use by a community of either one migrating group or a peasant village, and was clearly identified by the colonial authorities using landmarks in the geographic area of the corresponding administrative division [20]. It helped stabilise the migration areas of the different Kazak families, to a certain degree, although it did not solve the problem of intra-community friction stemming from transboundary pasturelands.

Apart from the Russian administrative-territorial system, an important force behind land and water use in Semirechie was the migratory policy of the Tsarist government, launched in the mid-19th century.

In the 1860–1880s, the local colonial authorities initiated and channelled mass migrations of large groups of the sedentary population, which included Russian peasants, Kazaks, Uighurs and Dungans, to Semirechie from the inner regions of the Russian empire and the Kuldjinsky krai (region) of the Ch’in Empire. Soon it led to the appearance of a number of fixed farm settlements in the piedmont zones and the valleys in the high mountain ranges. Fourteen Cossack villages and remote points had been established in Semirechie by the beginning of 1860s. In 1870, there was a population of around 87.300 who owned 555.900 dessiatinas (an old Russian measure of length; 1 dessiatina = 10,900 sq. metres) of land [21].

By the end of the 19th century, Cossack and peasant villages, as well as Uighur and Dungan settlements existed in all the uyezds of the Semirechie oblast. They occupied the most fertile land plots which had ample water supplies. Together with the sedentary-farming colonisation of the northern piedmonts of Zailisky and Djungarsky Alatau, the first cities in Semirechie were established and extensively developed in the second half of 19th century. Pishpek, Verny, Kopal and Djarkent, later became the most densely populated centres of sedentary culture in this landscape zone as well as for South Kazakhstan.

By the end of the 19th century, there were around 71.900 Russian and Ukrainian settlers in Semirechie, most of them living in the Verny uyezd (35.5 thousand men) and in the Lepsy uyezd (22.1 thousand), the remaining 14.3 thousand living in three other uyezds. In addition, there were 55.8 thousand Uighurs and 15.3 thousand Dungans. They made up 54 communities and 99 settlements in the Verny, Kopalsky and Djarkentsky uyezds of the Semirechie oblast [22].

From 1887 to 1915 numerous groups of peasants moved from European Russia and Siberia to Semirechie. Their influx had increased the Slav population to 118.5 thousand by the end of the pre-revolution period. The majority of Russians and Ukrainians were densely settled in the Verny uyezd where their population was around 72.700 [23].

From the second half of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian peasants, Uighurs, Dungans and other sedentary settlers farmed in the piedmont and mountainous zones of the region. The Kazaks and the Kyrgyz, being hereditary nomadic pastoralists, continued their mobile life styles and lived only in the desert areas of Semirechie. Big groups of these nomads also migrated in the high-mountain ranges and piedmonts, making their camps in many places close to the agrarian settlements of the Uighurs, Russian peasants and Cossacks.

The history of the socio-economic development of the multicultural population of the South Balkhash within the Russian state is recorded in various documents such as the statistical survey materials for the Semirechie oblast dating from 1911–1913 and the large-scale 10-versta (1 versta = 1.6 km) maps of the Turkestan region drawn from the end of the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century. Most of the documents were preserved in the Kazakhstan Central State Archive and the largest Russian archives of St-Petersburg and Moscow as well as in the libraries of these cities and Almaty. Their collections are accessible to foreign scientists.

In general, the history of the colonization and of the economic–cultural mastery of various regions of Semirechie were erratically mentioned in pre-revolution documents and the maps of the time. They give the details about the economies of the nomadic Kazaks, Russian and Uighurs settlers in the piedmont areas of southeast Kazakhstan, while the characteristic features of the nomadic strategy of land use under the extreme conditions in the Chu–Ili Mountains and the Taukum desert are given scant and infrequent attention. The economic–cultural arrangements of the sedentary agrarian settlements in the high mountain areas of Semirechie were given even less attention in the historical documents and maps from those years.

From the above, the necessity of a complex inter-disciplinary approach to the study of the history of human-nature interaction in South Balkhash becomes obvious. Such an approach should involve a wide range of historical records and cartographic materials, archaeological artefacts, demographic survey data from different periods and special natural-science study data. Such an inter-disciplinary approach is needed due to the big gap in the representative factual data on many aspects of the historical process in question. The absence of developed techniques of written transmission of information with former Eurasian nomads and the continued lack of interest concerning their economic life by the sedentary peoples of neighbouring Asiatic countries. Under these circumstances, a complex method would be the only tool effective in revealing the laws of cultural utilization of natural resources in the local migratory and sedentary farming societies of Semirechie

during last centuries. This would also draw us closer to solutions for the several complex environmental issues of the region.

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