Foreword

**Mediators of The Empire in Central Asia
(1820-1928)**

Special issue edited by Isabelle Ohayon (Centre d'études des mondes
russe, caucasien et centre-européen, CNRS, EHESS) and Tomohiko Uyama
(Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University)

Isabelle Ohayon

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/8211>

DOI: 10.4000/monderusse.8211

ISSN: 1777-5388

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 October 2015

Number of pages: 617-620

ISBN: 978-2-7132-2507-9

ISSN: 1252-6576

Electronic reference

Isabelle Ohayon, « Mediators of The Empire in Central Asia (1820-1928) », *Cahiers du monde russe* [Online], 56/4 | 2015, Online since 01 October 2015, Connection on 25 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/8211> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.8211>

This text was automatically generated on 25 September 2020.

Foreword

Mediators of The Empire in Central Asia (1820-1928)

Special issue edited by Isabelle Ohayon (Centre d'études des mondes russe, caucasien et centre-européen, CNRS, EHESS) and Tomohiko Uyama (Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University)

Isabelle Ohayon

- 1 One characteristic feature of empires is that they invent or design mediation technologies to hold together a number of diverse communities, territories and cultures. Both the extent and complexity of imperial constructions require this capacity for mutual negotiation between colonisers and incorporated societies. As has been shown by world historians, in particular Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper,¹ the combination of multi-layered, inter-twined powers with a variety of legal statuses and regimes gave empires a flexibility in government that to some extent ensured their continued existence.
- 2 Mediators of this power, intermediaries for the mother country at every level, thus hold a decisive position in the administration of empires. In addition to their involvement in the defence and exploitation of territory, it is by the use they make of imperial structures that they leave their mark. For the Empire is manufactured by weaving complex relationships between subjects, indigenous mediators and colonial authorities.
- 3 For the “imperial” history of Central Asia—extended here as far as Stalin’s revolution from above, both because the apparatus continued to include large numbers of indigenes and because this time span reveals the unbroken role of the stakeholders²—standard historiography long concentrated on the instruments and institutions devised for governance at the local level. This “institutionalising” history has now been joined by a research movement that sees imperial power through the lens of the stakeholders; this reversal of focus reveals the vernacular thinking behind government. At the same time, standard analyses of the colonial situation in terms of coercion and resistance have been replaced by paradigms that make the forms of

incorporation more intelligible. Whether in Paul Werth's concept of subversion³ used by indigenes to cope with constraint, or Tomohiko Uyama's evidence of adaptation⁴ as an interchangeable form of strategies of collaboration and resistance, or Sean Pollock's "empire by invitation",⁵ focusing on colonised communities' interest in being colonised, many different interpretations of the imperial experience are providing a grassroots understanding based on the voices of those actors.

- 4 Examining indigenous mediators is a way of explaining how the Russian imperial system maintained itself and developed despite the small numbers of Europeans in the colonial bureaucracies of Central Asia. Whether in the Kazakh steppes gradually colonised from the 18th century or Turkestan conquered in 1865, central control was lax and needed local supporters. In this issue dedicated to Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomadic societies, mediators are seen first as they exercise the state power the imperial authorities conferred on/delegated to them (Akiyama, Sultangalieva). This interface position corresponds to a point in time when the indigenes were not as yet formulating any political demands in the language of national movements. Second, mediators are seen precisely as devising new forms of political action, using tactics to be found within the political spectrum of the Russian Empire and early USSR (Uyama, Hallez, Amanzholova). From 1905 to 1928, national elites were no longer simply relaying the discourse and priorities of the central authority to their own societies but also their own ideas in the interest of those societies. They managed this by inventing a language and tactics taken both from their own repertory of actions and the colonisers' political culture, including its most subversive aspects.
- 5 The weakness of Russian power—already shown in recent research into colonial Central Asia⁶—can be seen in these articles as being an essential condition for developing the status of the Empire's mediators. Tetsu Akiyama's article on the colonial government of Kyrgyzia from 1867 shows how much the Russian military authorities depended on the *manaps*, Kyrgyz tribal chiefs, to administer the region and enforce public order and colonial rule. He explains the often passive and unintended process whereby colonial authority was jointly constructed in the figure of the *manaps*. The process did not follow the ideals of the colonisers, who, while never fully trusting their indigenous representatives, in practice sacrificed their "civilising mission"—in this case sedentarisation policy—to the need for stability. Gulmira Sultangalieva's article describes the encounter between the Russian normative and administrative construction and the Kazakh political elites, emerging from the world of khans, sultans and customary judges. She examines forms of cooptation and the incentives—moral and political as well as financial—the indigenes had in the imperial enterprise, such as ennoblement and the award of military titles, attaching them to the history of the administrative construction of the colonised territory. This form of integration was accompanied from the latter half of the 19th century on by a policy of education within the *ad hoc* Russian institutions of the Empire that enhanced this indigenous colonial bureaucracy, whose material ties were still rooted in the life of the steppes : the cover photograph shows a meeting with participants sitting on the ground against an endless steppe, listening to a Russian police officer. Tomohiko Uyama examines the relationship in the 1910s between a regional governor in the steppes and those major figures of the Kazakh intellectual elite who were soon to found the Kazakh national movement. In the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, when four Kazakhs had become State Duma deputies, the national intelligentsia's militant action expanded to challenge colonial authority. By examining the opinions and emotions of the Semipalatinsk oblast

governor as he reacted, Tomohiko Uyama also demonstrates that the central administrators' distrust of local elites revealed a lack of authority in the colonial apparatus. As a result, the repressive measures taken against the activists only strengthened and fed the demands of the emerging Kazakh home rule movement.

- 6 The political forms that emerged from confrontation with the colonial authorities followed the patterns of the period : petitions, demonstrations, parties, and congresses. Through this process of contestation, the mediators, who had been servants of the imperial state, became committed political actors, and this change occurred in practice via the formation of national movements and, after the 1917 Revolution, their integration into the Communist Party of the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic and the assumption of high political office.
- 7 However, this move did not correspond to any ideological continuity between the Kazakh movements and the Bolshevik party. As Xavier Hallez points out, Communists were virtually non-existent on the Kazakh party spectrum. The Communist Party of the Kazakh ASSR was not a pooling of political forces seeking a shared ideological goal. Its new Kazakh members joined with their own militant background and thinking about alliances, and helped to shape the Party with their own customs and ambitions. Xavier Hallez breaks ground in historiography by providing the first close analysis of individual careers and the interpersonal relations between activists, highlighting the tangle of networks that went to make up political groupings, within which the "national" message was formulated and disseminated. The "Kazakh Bolsheviks"—those who joined the Party—came from a complex background of differing types of thinking, tribal groups and social classes, having in common only that they saw themselves as spokesmen for their society and were educated. The swiftly ascendant Kazakh Communist Party was constructed as a battlefield for a handful of leading positions and as a new (soon perhaps the only) arena for pre-existing rivalries. The details are given by Dina Amanzholova, following Xavier Hallez with her analysis of the leading figures in the Kazakh Party and their tribulations until 1928. She offers a group sociology and retraces the intrigues, manipulations and strategies that were deployed as part of the stated policy of indigenising the apparatus. She examines the Kazakh leaders' heritage of cultural practices and codes in their daily party work and their difficult relations with the "Europeans" and the higher authorities in Moscow. In the spirit of this special issue, she attempts to go beyond noting the indigenes' tactical use of the apparatus, resources and rhetoric of Russian domination,⁷ and to see their relationship with these resources rather as a joint construction of power, discourse and decision-making in an "imperial" situation.

NOTES

1. Jane Burbank, Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History*, Princeton University Press, 2010.
2. This is not the place to address the imperial nature of the USSR, which has been extensively discussed. Cf. Slavic Review "The Multiethnic Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective", 65, 2 (2006) ; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of nations : Ethnographic knowledge and the making of Soviet*

Union (Ithaca – Londres : Cornell University Press, 2005) ; Terry Martin, *The affirmative Action Empire : Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Unions, 1923-1939* (Ithaca – Londres : Cornell University Press, 2001) ; Juliette Cadiot, *Le laboratoire impérial : Russie-URSS 1860-1940* (P. : Editions du CNRS, 2007).

3. Paul Werth, "From Resistance to Subversion : Imperial Power, Indigenous Opposition, and Their Entanglement", *Kritika*, 1, 1 (2000) : 21-43.

4. Tomohiko Uyama, "Invitation, Adaptation, and Resistance to Empires : Cases of Central Asia" in Tomohiko Uyama, ed., *Comparing Modern Empires : Imperial Rule and Decolonization in the Changing World Order* (Sapporo, Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, forthcoming).

5. Sean Pollock, "Empire by Invitation ? Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II", (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2006).

6. Alexander Morrison, *Russian Rule in Samarkand 1868-1910 : A Comparison with British India* (Oxford University Press(Oxford Historical Monographs), 2008) ; Tomohiko Uyama, "Mutual Relations and Perceptions of Russians and Central Asians : Preliminary Notes for Comparative Imperial Studies", *Empire and After : Essays in Comparative Imperial and Decolonization Studies* (Sapporo : Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2012), 28 et sqq.

7. Romain Bertrand, "Politiques du moment colonial. Historicités indigènes et rapports vernaculaires au politique en 'situation coloniale'", *Questions de Recherche*, 26 (Octobre 2008) : 26, 34.

AUTHOR

ISABELLE OHAYON

CNRS, CERCEC, EHESS, isabelle.ohayon@cnrs.fr