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Keeping cultural codes: the customs and ceremonies of ethnic minorities under Russian rule¹

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Abstract: When establishing its rule over other nationalities, the Russian Empire relied on local elites, including their aristocracy, tribal chiefs, and sometimes the clergy. In addition to retaining some of their traditional privileges, they were also granted new benefits. The same paradigm applied to the ethnic policy of both the Muscovite state and the Russian Empire: a combination of nation-wide standards of citizenship and management with local traditional principles of organizing society. The cultural codes of Russian officials and settlers on the one hand and the expanding state's non-Slavic population on its the eastern and southern frontiers overlapped and influenced each other. To lessen the opposition of its minorities, the empire's administration often adapted new regulations to their cultural norms. For pragmatic reasons, officials acknowledged the importance of at least showing some respect to subjects who spoke different languages and professed different beliefs. As a result of this interaction, the cultures of the rulers and the non-Russian nationalities they ruled influenced each other.

Keywords: ethnic policy, cultural code, elites, representation, ritual practices, “foreigners”

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Эксплуатация культурных кодов.

Обычаи «иноземцев/иноверцев/инородцев» в российских административных практиках²

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Аннотация: При налаживании управления национальными регионами центральные и местные власти Российской империи опирались и полагались на местные элиты, традиционные привилегированные слои – аристократию, родоплеменную верхушку, иногда духовенство. В отношении

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² В статью использованы фрагменты более ранних русскоязычных публикаций автора: Трепавлов В.В. «Древнее обихование» и царская инвеститура. восшествие на трон вассальных правителей в России XVII – начала XX в. // Восток. Афро-азиатские общества: история и современность. 2015. № 4. С. 5–16; Он же. Дипломатия взаимного узнавания: общение администрации и «инородцев» в восточных регионах России // Российская история. 2018. № 2. С. 3–12.

данной категории подданных практиковались сохранение некоторых старых, «дорусских» социальных привилегий и предоставление новых льгот. Просматривается общая парадигма этнической политики в Московском государстве и Российской империи: сочетание общегосударственных стандартов подданства и управления с локальными традиционными принципами организации жизни социума. Происходило взаимное наложение и последующее взаимовлияние различных культурных кодов, носителями которых выступали, с одной стороны, русские – в лице как административных органов, так и многочисленного простонародья, переселявшегося на окраины, с другой – неславянское население восточных и южных пространств расширявшегося государства. Элементы устоявшихся культурных норм соприкасались и переплетались в ситуациях, когда возникала необходимость привести в действие какие-либо административные действия – и при этом не вызвать отторжения у подданных. Зачастую это достигалось использованием «инородческих» обрядовых практик. Происходила своеобразная эксплуатация разноэтничных культурных кодов с сугубо прагматической целью: правящая элита отдавала себе отчет, насколько важно проявлять хотя бы внешнее внимание к подданным, которые говорят на разных языках и исповедуют различные верования. В процессе своеобразного обмена репрезентациями (жалование даров подданным и подношения царственным особам – иногда в форме дарообмена, сочетание общегосударственных и локальных обрядовых схем в практике коммуникаций с «инородческими» элитами) осуществлялась комбинация культурных сценариев как одного важных компонентов кодов соответствующих культур.

Ключевые слова: этническая политика, культурный код, элиты, репрезентация, обрядовые практики, «инородцы»

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Introduction

From the 16th to the 19th centuries, national minorities in Russia, tended to be objects of state policy rather than subjects. But this was not the result of disregard by the authorities. After all, most of the modern ethnic communities were just being formed at that time. One of the imperial government's principles was supra-ethnicity, which implied loyalty to the throne regardless of the language and religion of its subjects. At the same time, it was impossible to ignore the population's ethnic and cultural diversity.

When extending its authority over newly-conquered nationalities, the Russian Empire relied on their traditional privileged strata – nobles, tribal chiefs, as well as the clergy. In addition to retaining some of their traditional privileges, they were also granted new benefits. Local legal norms, such as Sharia and customary law, could also be incorporated into the empire's legislation for the relevant region. The same paradigm applied to the ethnic policy of both the Muscovite state and the Russian Empire: a combination of nation-wide standards of citizenship and governance with traditional local principles for organizing society. The cultural codes of Russian officials and settlers on the one hand and the expanding state's non-Slavic population on the other overlapped and influenced each other. As a result of this interaction, the cultures of the rulers and the non-Russian nationality they ruled influenced each other in the way the latter were governed. In part, officials used “foreign” ritual practices to avoid arousing resistance.

Foreign cultural elements in imperial government

In some culture taxes were understood to be voluntary offerings to the tsar, in return for the goods his officials provided, which were considered to be the ruler's gifts. The Chukchi thought that their tribute was taken from the tundra directly to the “Tsar-sun.”³

³ A.S. Zuev, *Prisoedinenie Chukotki k Rossii (vtoraya polovina XVII–XVIII vek)* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskogo otdeleniya RAN Publ., 2009), 381; A.S. Zuev, “Russko-aborigennye otnosheniia na krainem Severo-Vostoke Sibiri vo vtoroi polovini XVII–XVIII vekakh: ot konfrontatsii k adaptatsii,” in *Narodonaselenie*

According to their folklore, the latter could grant a person the right to live in a certain area in exchange for gifts. This was the way the tsar, when touched by the honey he was offered, responded to the elderly Pechenei of Mari tradition, giving him their land forever.⁴

The practice of collecting tribute in Southern and Western Siberia was typically carried out according to a solemn ritual that involved mutual gift giving. According to longstanding local tradition, Russian officials accepted tribute from “foreigners” and gave them presents in return. Sometimes more valuable than the tribute from his subjects, such “gifts from the tsar” included caftans, fur coats, and fabrics, among other.

This custom was not widespread in Eastern Siberia. Russian settlements there were scarce in resources, and provisioning them was a long and arduous process. In any case, Russia's rivalry with Mongolia and then with China prompted a rush to impose tribute on the local tribes rather than time-consuming campaigns to encourage them to become subjects of the tsar with material incentives.

The “gift for gift” algorithm also applied the empire's newly conquered Turkestan region in the second half of the 19th century. Every year its Governor-General received 35 thousand rubles from the treasury for entertainment expenses and diplomatic receptions. While enough to host envoys from Bukhara and Khiva, this proved to be insufficient to pay for the obligatory gifts in return.⁵ Since cheap presents were inappropriate, he periodically asked St Petersburg for more money.

The visits of viceroys and governors to their jurisdictions involved a blend of Russian and local customs and rituals. Regional administrators often set off with modest guards to underscore their power and trust in the population under their control. Kabardian auls (villages) greeted the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, with bread and salt “with typical Russian hospitality, which has also become a custom among our natives.”⁶ Meanwhile, across the Caspian Sea, as Turkestan Governor-General M.G. Cherniaev proceeded through city streets with his retinue, his adjutant tossed handfuls of coins into the crowd in the Eastern fashion.⁷

In the same region, as well as in Bukhara and Khiva, the Russian administration performed the traditional rituals of the inhabitants to legitimize its rule. According to local custom, presenting a *khalat* [robe] is a form of distinction, and they were given by the governor on behalf of the tsar as well.⁸ Bukhara's emir also gave robes to the officials and messengers sent to him from Tashkent (the Governor-General's residence). However, Russian officials were obligated to refuse them, since it was forbidden to cover the epaulettes and decorations on their uniforms. Yielding to this prohibition, the emir presented the *khalat* to Russian officers by putting them on their chairs to present it.⁹

Sibiri. Strategi i praktiki mezhkul'turnoi kommunikatsii (XVII – nachalo XX veka) (Novosibirsk: Institut arheologii i etnografii Sibirskogo otdeleniya RAN Publ., 2008), 94, 142.

⁴ *Marinskii fol'klor. Mify, legendy, predaniia* (Ioshkar-Ola: Mariiskoe knizhnoe izdatelstvo Publ., 1991), 216.

⁵ M.A. Terent'ev, *Rossiiia i Angliia v Srednei Azii* (St. Petersburg: I.P. Merkur'ev Press., 1875), 331.

⁶ “Priezd ego imperatorskogo vysochestva gosudaria velikogo knaza Mikhaila Nikolaevicha v Kabardinski okrug Terskoi oblasti,” *Terskie vedomosti*, June 4, 1869, 2–3.

⁷ V.V. Bartold, “Istoriia kul'turnoi zhizni Turkestana,” in Bartol'd, *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury Publ., 1963), pp. 167–433; The slow progress of the Cherniaevskaia cavalcade was dictated by local rules of decency and Muslim religious precepts – “Haste is a property of the Devil.” See: N.S. Lykoshin, *Khoroshii ton na Vostoke* (Moscow: AST Publ., 2005).

⁸ “Nagrashdnye kaftanami,” *Istoriia nagradnoi faleristiki Rossii*, accessed December 11, 2020, <http://www.allfaler.ru/ru/nagrad-sistem/nagradnay-sistema-ros-imperii/znaki-otlichy-ros-impr/46-nagradnye-kaftany-rossijskoj-imperii>.

⁹ V.V. Krestovskii, *V gostyakh u emira bukharskogo* (St. Petersburg: A.S. Suvorin Publ., 1887), 140.

The emperor's trips in his empire invariably involved gifts too. Almost everywhere he travelled, the tsar received the customary greeting of bread and salt.¹⁰ Only the Kalmyks and Buryats, according to Tibetan Buddhist practice, offered white silk scarves instead. Moreover, in 1888 the tushins and pshavs, inhabitants of the Georgian highlands, presented Alexander III with their "bread and salt: lavash on a wooden dish made with crude images of their crafts and hunting."¹¹

Caucasian highlanders also often offered articles of local dress to the emperor and members of his family. During the second half of the 19th century, these gifts were not relegated to the wardrobes of the Romanovs, since Circassian coats were fashionable then in Russia proper. Even Alexander II and Nicholas II wore them,¹² although they also did so to show their respect for their Caucasian possessions.

A combination of imperial and local ritual practices was also in evidence during formal meetings. While imperial audiences adhered to court etiquette, when the monarch and his consort attended receptions at the Bukharan and Khivan embassies they were served sweetmeats, fruit and tea, in the Central Asian *dastarkhan* tradition.

Russian officials likewise incorporated native elements at the local level. Having recognized the emperor as their sovereign, the rulers of the Kazakh zhuzes (hordes) were permitted to keep their title of khan until the first quarter of the 19th century to encourage their loyalty to the empire. As a result, when khans and leading sultans visited the governor in Orsk and Orenburg to discuss practical matters or observe important occasions like the tsar's coronation, they were solemnly received according to a blend of Russian court ceremonies and Oriental rituals. By gradually becoming acquainted with the empire's political culture, the tsar's Asian subjects gradually became accustomed to being part of a single state.

A Kazakh khan typically came accompanied by a large retinue of relatives, nobles and servants. A detachment of Russian cavalry with well-drilled, richly decorated mounts and, on occasion, a carriage, rode out to meet him. Cannons roared, trumpets blared, and kettledrums were beaten as imperial troops in formation greeted them when they entered the local garrison.

Russian ceremony then gave way to the Oriental. The commoners in the khan's party dismounted at the courtyard's outer gate in front of the tent or building intended for the audience. Everyone laid down their arms, and when the sultans and other nobles reached the middle of the courtyard, they also came down from their horses, as did the Khan just before reaching the entrance itself. There he was met by officers arranged according to rank, with the higher to the front, and a row of staff officers awaited him in the carpeted reception room.

Negotiations often began with *namaz* (Islamic prayer) for the tsar's health. After this supplication to Allah, the khan and his retinue sat down in the traditional order of the steppe, with the Russian host in the middle and the khan to his right, while the rest of the ceremony's participants were arrayed on the sides on chairs and on the floor, according to rank. The visits obligatorily ended with a long and hearty meal. Hosting the receptions was expensive, and officials of Orenburg's governor occasionally petitioned St. Petersburg for raises to cover the cost of greeting visiting "Kirghiz-Kaisaks."¹³

¹⁰ The Russian custom to meet provincial officials with bread and salt was also performed in Turkestan. Furthermore, in the East, salt symbolized the favors the ruler bestowed on his people and the army. See: V.V. Bartold, *Istoriia*, 355.

¹¹ V.A. Potto, *Tsarskaia seiya na Kavkaze 18 sentiabria – 14 okiyabria 1888 goda* (Tiflis: Tipografiia Okruzhnogo shtaba Kavkazskogo voennogo okruga Press., 1889), 180.

¹² L.S. Gatagova, "V plenu 'Kavkazskogo plennika'." *Istoriik i khudozhnik* 2, no. 4 (2005): 168.

¹³ I.V. Erofeeva, *Khan Abulkhair: polkovodets, pravitel' i politik* (Almaty: Sanat Publ., 1999), 226; V.F. Shakhmatova, F.N. Kireeva, and T.Zh. Shoinbaeva, eds. *Kazakhsko-russkie otnosheniia v XVI–XVIII vekakh*

The meetings became cheaper after the abolition of the khan's power in the Middle and Junior zhuzes in the 1820s. The new Kazakh elite, including senior sultans, aul elders and volost governors now met regional and provincial heads, and largely occupied themselves with speeches, awards and compliments. From time to time, the Russian official did spend money on a feast to honor his guests, who reciprocated by staging festive wrestling matches and horse races.¹⁴ The reduction of formal procedures was part of a general trend towards the simplification of diplomatic norms.¹⁵

The fusion of traditions was clearly evident during the ceremonies to install a ruler dependent on the tsar, which were an important element of his government's ethnic policy. On the one hand, they were meant to emphasize the empire's power and greatness, and on the other, to demonstrate the monarch's favor of the newly appointed vassal. Meanwhile, the new ruler derived double legitimacy from his being "elected" by his followers on the steppe and appointed by the emperor. The latter made him an instrument to acclimatize his fellow tribesmen to Russian rule. History shows that the final outcome of such adaptation was the full incorporation of their territories in the administrative structure of the empire, without keeping any previous regional differences.

Russian rulers appointed the khans of the Kazakhs from the middle of 18th century until the first quarter of the 19th. As mentioned above, these nomadic leaders derived their authority from two sources – the will of their nobility, clergy and clans as expressed in a vote, as well as the tsar's confirmation of his election with a patent. The votes for the khans of the Junior and the Middle Zhuzes, were generally held in a sacred site, like the city of Turkestan. In accordance with their ancient rite, the elected khan was raised on a white felt mat to mark his accession. Special envoys then went to St. Petersburg, where they conveyed the nomadic elite's choice and presented a petition for imperial approval of the new khan's candidacy.

St. Petersburg was willing to use traditional institutions on such occasions, since they legitimized a ruler loyal to Russia, when "previously the khans were just lifted up on white felt mats." Thus, in 1791 Catherine II expressed her wish that the Kazakhs should find a successor to the deceased Khan Nurali entirely "according to the ancient Kirghiz-Kaisak custom."¹⁶ Nominations were usually decided with the government in advance, and the sovereign's final approval was limited to a brief formal audience with the Kazakh delegation to announce his or her gracious consent.¹⁷

In addition to the imperial patent and the decision of his nobles, the authority of Kalmyk khans also rested on the wishes of the Dalai Lama, their religious leader. In the presence of a Russian official, a special lama solemnly presented the khan with a letter from Lhasa conferring his rank, throne name and seal. When in February 1737 the Russian government declared Donduk Ombo the ruler of the Kalmyk Khanate, he did not dare to call himself khan, since he had not received confirmation from the Tibetan capital. The next khan, Donduk Dashi, found himself in the same predicament. However, their predecessor and uncle, Tseren Donduk, adopted the title without any hesitation,

(Alma-Ata: Akademia nauk Kazakhskoi SSR Publ., 1961), 652; Zh.B. Kundakbaeva, "Znakom milosti E.I.V." *Rossii i narody Severnogo Prikaspiia v XVIII veke* (Moscow; St. Petersburg: AIRO-XXI Publ., 2005), 62; P.I. Rychkov, *Istoriia Orenburgskaia po uchrezhdenii Orenburgskoi gubernii* (Ufa: [S. n.], 2001), 90, 91, 95, 127.

¹⁴ "Priem deputatsii ot kirgiz Turgayskoy oblasti g. orenburgskim general-gubernatorom," *Turgaiskie gubernskie vedomosti*, March 1, 1869, 49; A. Ryn-Peskovskii, "V kirgizskoi stepi," *Turgaiskaia gazeta*, June 11, 1895, 2–4.

¹⁵ O.G. Ageeva, *Diplomaticheskii tseremonial imperatorskoi Rossii. XVIII vek* (Moscow: Novy khronograf Publ., 2012), 438.

¹⁶ Shakhmatova, *Kazakhsko-russkie otnosheniia*, 469.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

since he had already received his seal and sacred name from the Dalai Lama.¹⁸ The Tibetan leader's approval was important to ensure the loyalty of the Kalmyk nobility.¹⁹ The noyons and zayisans (Kalmyk nobles) only obeyed rulers whose status had been approved by all three sources of legitimacy: their vote as well as the sanction of the Russian emperor and the Dalai Lama.

In the 18th century, the election of the khans of the Junior or Middle Zhuzes usually preceded his investiture on behalf of the emperor, which was carried out by his representative. On the instructions of the Governor-General or other official, the newly elected ruler was to arrive at the border. At the same time, there was nothing in the rituals that would clearly indicate the khan's vassalage to the Romanovs. On the contrary, the authorities marked the occasion with a magnificent and solemn ceremony to show their respect for the new nomadic leader.

Russian authorities gradually increased their involvement in the appointment of the Kazakh khans, and on 9 November 1792 the Senate issued a decree to set out the procedure's details.²⁰ According to its provisions, unless the ceremony were held in Orenburg or a Russian garrison, it would be carried out on the steppe, where there was enough space to accommodate the military parade as well as many spectators. Distinguished individuals stood on a carpet spread in a tent or in the open air as they listened to the announcement of the imperial patent, which was read both in Russian and their own language. The kneeling khan then kissed the document and listened to a mullah, who read the oath drawn up in the Senate or the College of Foreign Affairs. Having sworn allegiance to the throne and kissed the Koran, he set his seal on the text of the oath with his signet ring. The new ruler then received a diploma and a patent, while he was dressed in a brocade robe, a hat and a *shuba* (fur coat), and girded with a saber.

After the new khan was congratulated and the spectators ritualistically tore up his old garments, the installation concluded with a feast of *beshbarmak* (a Turkic dish of boiled meat and noodles), wine, beer and honey to the sounds of music, fireworks and celebratory cannon fire, as well as *baiga* (horse races). The new Kalmyk khan was proclaimed in a similar fashion, albeit with Buddhist rather than Muslim rituals.²¹ Siberian princes and *toyons* (elders), however, did not merit such magnificent ceremonials. Instead, they were simply summoned to the local governor, who issued an imperial decree to vest him with the appropriate powers, which could also be withdrawn at the tsar's pleasure.²²

¹⁸ M.M. Batmaev, *Sotsial'no-politicheskii stroi i khoziaistvo kalmykov v XVII–XVIII vv.* (Elista: Dzhangar Publ., 2002), 93; N.Ia. Bichurin (Iakinf). *Istoricheskoe obozrenie oiratov ili kalmykov s XV stoletiya do nastoiashchego vremeni.* Elista: Kalmytskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo Publ., 1991, 103; A.A. Kurapov, *Buddizm i vlast' v Kalmytskom khanstve XVII–XVIII vv.* (Elista: Dzhangar Publ., 2007), 96, 156, 168, 169, 189, 190; N.N. Palmov, *Etiudy po istorii privolzhskikh kalmykov*, pt. 2 (Astrakhan: Kalmytskii oblastnoi ispolnitel'nyi komitet Publ., 1927), 164.

¹⁹ According to D.V. Vasiliev, the desire to legitimize the right to being the khan by the Dalai Lama's permission was evidence that the Kalmyks understood the attitude of the Russian government towards this institution as only secular, but not a sacral phenomenon. At the same time, the Kalmyk elite's wish to receive approval from St. Petersburg indicated their desire to stay in Russia. See: D.V. Vasiliev, *Rossii i Kazakhskaya step': administrativnaia politika i status okrainy. XVIII – pervaiia polovina XIX veka* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia entsiklopediia Publ., 2014), 401; Moreover, the Dalai Lama repeatedly insisted that his followers on the Volga leave the Russian tsar and move to Dzungariia.

²⁰ See: V.V. Trepavlov, *Simvoly i ritualy v etnicheskoi politike Rossii XVI–XIX vv.* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Olega Abyshko), 198–201.

²¹ See: M.M. Batmaev, *Kalmyki*, 337.

²² E.V. Perevalova, "O znachenii zhalovannykh gramot ostiatskikh kniaztszov," in A.V. Golovnev, ed. *Obskie ugry'. Materialy II-go Sibirskogo simpoziuma "Kul'turnoe nasledie narodov Zapadnoi Sibiri"* (Tobolsk; Omsk: Omskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii universitet Publ., 1999), 156, 159.

For several centuries the shamkhals, North Dagestan's rulers, had been considered vassals of the Persian shah. In 1793, Catherine II tried to include the nation in her empire's sphere of influence by promoting Shamkhal Muhammad to the rank of privy councilor with a salary of 6,000 rubles and sent him a *sorguch* (a feather adorned with diamonds for a hat). Her son, Paul I, granted the right to succeed him to his son Mehdi together with a *sorguch*, and when Dagestan became part of the Russian Empire in 1836, Nicholas I likewise presented Shamkhal Abu Muslim with the ruler's *sorguch*.²³

Russian politicians were well aware of the great importance of formal markers of high rank for their vassals. Shamkhals valued the right to wear the *sorguch* no less than the degree of privy councilor. In Persian political culture, the *sorguch* on the ruler's hat symbolized power over his subjects. St. Petersburg granted the shamkhal the same decoration to proclaim his liberation from the former hegemony of the shahs. The Russian ceremony for the installation of Dagestan's ruler also involved other symbols. In 1784, the Caucasian commander, Colonel-General Count P. S. Potemkin, handed the shamkhal a saber and a sable shuba along with a certificate confirming his status as a subject of the empress.²⁴

In the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, Russia and China challenged each other for domination over the Sayan-Altai region. At one time the local tribes had been subjects of the Qing dynasty and became accustomed to the Sino-Manchu administrative order. The Qing governors in Mongolia bestowed Manchu titles corresponding to military ranks upon traditional Altai leaders (shulengs, zayisans, demichi), and they handed over special headdresses which indicated the rank of the owner on behalf of Beijing. Zayisans wore hats with a blue ball and a peacock feather, demichi – with a blue ball, shulengs – with a white one.²⁵

When Russia made Uriankhai (Tuva) a protectorate in 1914, it partially kept the Qing system of ranks. Thus, while investing one of the rulers with administrative powers, the region's Russian Commissioner conferred the rank of terigun-zayisan on him, with the right to wear a red ball of second degree on his hat.²⁶

When needed, the juxtaposition of imperial and local political cultures was accompanied by efforts to combine various ways of legitimizing citizenship. In particular, swearing allegiance to the throne was carried out with Muslim, Buddhist or pagan religious symbols. Muslims swore "according to their law with the Koran," kissing the holy book, which the mullah brought, and placed on his head. The cleric then read out the oath's text, which the newly appointed ruler acknowledged with his seal.²⁷

While Buddhism had actively spread among Kalmyks/Oiots beginning in the 1610s, pagan rituals persisted for a long time. Swearing oaths of loyalty to the Russian crown was still considered to be the most convincing way to demonstrate one's sincerity. Nicolaas Witsen described Taisha Munchak's repentance to the envoy of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich after migrating to the distant steppes during Stepan Razin's uprising:

²³ P.G. Butkov, *Materialy dlia novoi istorii Kavkaza s 1722 po 1803 god*, pt. 2 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1869), 290; "Shamkhaly Tarkovskie," in *Sbornik svedenii o kazskikh gortsakh*, vol. 1 (Tiflis: [N.s.], 1868), 62, 65; Some shamkhals were made generals.

²⁴ V.G. Gadzhiev, *Rol' Rossii v istorii Dagestana* (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1965), 148.

²⁵ G.P. Samaev, *Gorny Altai v XVII – seredine XIX v.: problemy politicheskoi istorii i prisoedineniia k Rossii* (Gorno-Altaiisk: Gorno-Altaiiskoe otdelenie Altaiiskogo knizhnogo izdatel'stva Publ., 1991), 163.

²⁶ S.I. Vainshtein, M.H. Mannai-ool, *Istoriya Tuvy*, vol. 1 (Novosibirsk: Nauka Publ., 2015), 354.

²⁷ See, for example: V.F. Shakhmatova, *Kazakhsko-russkie otnosheniia*, 633, 641; P.I. Rychkov, *Istoriia Orenburgskaia*, 93, 94, 131.

He took an oath on the riverbank, and, placing two arrows in front of himself, one on top of the other, as well as a saber to his side, stepped over them, saying that the arrows and the sword should pierce him if he breaks his oath.²⁸

Munchak's son, future Ayuka Khan, also pledged to keep his *shert* (oath) with pagan visual and verbal images. In 1673 he declared that if the Kalmyks violated the *shert*, then,

God's wrath and a fiery sword will be upon us, the taishi, our children, the murzas, and on their children, and on all the ulus people, and with the saber that I, Ayuka taisha, draw out from its scabbard and put to my head and throat, I will be stabbed to death by the enemy, and we will be cursed by our Kalmyk faith in this century and those to come.

After these words, he took out a saber from its scabbard and put it to his head and throat.²⁹

Having received a saber from Peter I during the Persian campaign of 1722, Ayuka demonstrated the inviolability of his allegiance. He ordered his people to stand in a circle and shoot several arrows from their bows into the air, after which he approached the emperor with the words: "This saber and these arrows will always be ready to defeat the enemies of Russia."³⁰

The Kalmyks also used Buddhist symbols. When giving the *shert* in 1661, Munchak "kissed his God Burkhan, Bichik (the holy book), licked his rosaries and put his saber on his throat" (that is, the military ritual was still observed here – *author's note*).³¹ On a similar occasion in 1724, the lama set the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni on the head of Tseren Donduk, viceroy of the Kalmyk Khanate, as he took an oath.³²

Conclusion

During the imperial era, Russian officials actively incorporated traditional cultural elements into their ceremonies with ethnic minorities. These were a way for the sovereign to show his respect (however insincere) for his subjects of other faiths, as well as for their traditional way of life. In a way they exploited different ethnic cultural codes for purely pragmatic reasons: the ruling elite knew the importance of at least feigning attention to subjects of the tsar who spoke other languages and professed different beliefs.

These efforts to appropriate different cultures suggest that the imperial government endeavored both to preserve the traditions of its non-Russian population and limit interfering in their daily lives to preserve security and stability. On such ceremonial occasions as exchanging gifts or meeting the local elites, officials combined important elements of

²⁸ N. Vitsen, *Severnaia i Vostochnaia Tartariia, vkluchaiushchaia oblasti, raspolozhennii v severnoi i vostochnoi chastakh Evropy i Azii*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Pegasus Publ., 2010), 362.

²⁹ N.M. Rogozhin, and M.M. Batmaev, eds. *Posol'skie knigi po sviaziam Rossii s Kalmytskim khanstvom 1672–1675 gg.* (Elista: Dzhangar Publ., 2003), 57, 63; The Heavenly Fire Sword was a popular symbol of punishment for a convicted criminal. In 1604, a tsarist messenger told the Nogai murza that, should he be disloyal and disobedient, "God's fire sword will kill and the tsar's grace... will no longer be." See: N.V. Rozhdestvenskii, ed. *Akty vremeni Lzhedmitriia I-go (1603–1606 gg.)* (Moscow: [S. n.], 1918), 97; In 1648, a sample a text with an oath of allegiance to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich was made with the same warning: "Strike me with God's fire sword and awaken cursed ulcers in my family for all time..." See: A. Malinovskii, ed. *Sobranie gosudarstvennykh gramot i dogovorov*, pt. 3 (Moscow: Selivanovskii Press., 1822), 441–442.

³⁰ N.N. Palmov, *Ocherk istorii kalmytskogo naroda za vremia ego prebyvaniia v predelakh Rossii* (Elista: Kalmytskii oblastnoi ispolnitel'nyi komitet Publ., 1992), 48.

³¹ N.Ia. Bichurin, *Istoricheskie obozrenie*, 84.

³² A.A. Kurapov, *Buddizm i vlast'*, 124.

their own, Russian culture with those of the people with whom they dealt.³³ In this way, they laid the foundations for an ethnocultural synthesis and, over time, an all-Russian, imperial identity among the tsar's non-Slavic subjects.

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³³ On cultural scenarios as important tactics and strategies for communication see: G.E. Kreidman, and S.I. Perezvereva, *Neverbal'nye ritualia i ikh raznovidnosti* (Moscow: Znak Publ., RGGU Publ., 2013), 105–118; A. Wierzbicka, " 'Cultural Scripts': a semantic approach to cultural analysis and cross-cultural communication," in L. Bouton, ed. *Pragmatics and Language Learning* (Urbana-Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994), 1–24.

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