

**“The Scourge of Stock Raising”: Zhūt, Limiting Environments, and the Economic Transformation of the Kazakh Steppe<sup>1</sup>**

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In 1894, the editors of the official, bilingual newspaper *Dala Ualaitining Gazeti* (*Newspaper of the Steppe Region*, published in Russian as *Kirgizskaia Stepnaia Gazeta/Kazakh Steppe Newspaper*) provided a classic account of a recurring and frightful phenomenon on the grasslands of Central Asia:

Around Akmolinsk *uezd* [district], with the exception of southern *volosts* [cantons], on the night of 10-11 November rain fell, which then turned into snow, which then on 13 November turned into a blizzard, continuing for days. Then, as a consequence of the thaw on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, all this snow melted, and on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> froze, covering the land with a quite thick and strong crust of ice, which prevents the livestock’s access to pasturage. This event will affect the nomadic population’s welfare unfavorably; because of the dry summer, they prepared few hay reserves.<sup>2</sup>

Such events were correlated with the local or general failure of the fodder-grass harvest, known in the Kazakh language as *zhūt*.<sup>3</sup> Recurring with particular severity and scope every ten to twelve years<sup>4</sup>, and more frequently on a small scale, *zhūt* was a disaster for the pastoralists of

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<sup>2</sup> *Kirgizskaia stepnaia gazeta* [hereafter *KSG*] 1894, no. 3. “Kirgiz” as an ethnonym referred, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the ethnic groups known today as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz (also sometimes called “kara-kirgiz” or “dikokamennyi kirgiz” at the time).

<sup>3</sup> Because it reduces the population of wild grazing animals on the steppe, *zhūt* remains interesting to mammalian biologists. They define *zhūt* as a set of conditions “in which the snow cover is deep (i.e. 30 cm or more) or dense (i.e. 25-30 g/cm<sup>2</sup>) or when there is a layer of ice over the snow” (5). See A. B. Bekenov *et al*, “The ecology and management of the saiga antelope in Kazakhstan,” *Mammal Review* 28.1 (1998), 1-52.

<sup>4</sup> The other common Kazakh term for a *zhūt*, *qoian-zhili* (year of the hare), refers to a year of the Zodiac cycle, implying a period of 12 years for its worst manifestations; the last three major *zhūts* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century occurred in the winters of 1867-68, 1879-80, and 1891-92.

the Kazakh steppe; if human efforts to help animals obtain fodder beneath the ice and snow failed, the Kazakhs who depended on the slowly-starving livestock for food and clothing were forced either to take flight or slaughter their animals to avert starvation, a fate that it was not always possible to avoid. Outside observers reported that animals perished in fabulous numbers; one author reported that hundreds of thousands of sheep had perished during a bad zhūt of 1855-56<sup>5</sup>, while another estimated that, depending on local conditions, the freezing of pastures could carry off anywhere from 10-70% of Kazakhs' livestock.<sup>6</sup> Despite its predictable occurrence, its scope remained potentially devastating, and the task before a tsarist government that sought to remediate it formidable.

Political and cultural factors influence the scope and scale of the impact of natural disasters on human and non-human populations alike.<sup>7</sup> So, too, do factors as diverse as state capacity, ideology, and perceptions of population and landscape shape the decision space in which state and non-state actors respond to disasters.<sup>8</sup> But simply to see a natural event as a disaster takes real intellectual labor, and is itself historically contingent. Just as humanitarian journalists in early Victorian Britain discovered chronic hunger among the urban poor, so too did

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<sup>5</sup> N. I. Krasovskii, sost., *Materialy dlia geografii Rossiiskoi imperii, sobrannye ofitserami General'nogo shtaba: oblast' Sibirskikh kirgizov*, vyp. 2 (St. Petersburg: tip. Transhel', tip. Rotger i Shneider, 1868), 10.

<sup>6</sup> O. A. Shkapskii, "Nekotoryia dannia dlia osveshcheniia kirgizskogo voprosa," part 2, *Russkaia mysl'* (July 1897), 36.

<sup>7</sup> The classic statement of this thesis with respect to famines is Amartya Sen, *Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation* (New York: Oxford, 1981); Mike Davis offers a devastating critique of "the malign interaction between climactic and economic processes" (12) in nineteenth-century famines in *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the Third World* (New York: Verso, 2001). Also see Andy Bruno, "Tumbling snow: vulnerability to avalanches in the Soviet North," *Environmental history* 18.4 (October 2013), 683-709.

<sup>8</sup> For the connection between the ruling ideology of Confucianism and famine relief in China c.f. Lillian Li, *Fighting famine in North China: state, market, and environmental decline, 1690s-1990s* (Stanford: Stanford, 2007) 3; for 19<sup>th</sup>-century conflicts about the priority to be given to famine relief, Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from iron: cultural responses to famine in nineteenth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), especially 90-113. The literature on the Irish famine of the 1840s is vast; I have been influenced by the argument in Peter Gray, *Famine, land, and politics: British government and Irish society, 1843-1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999).

tsarist officials gradually come to see zhūt as a matter that required serious, transformative intervention in the lives of its largely nomadic and pastoralist Kazakh population.<sup>9</sup> This was part of a broader reconfiguration of the relationship between the tsarist state and its subject population, as well as between the imperial center and a remote borderland. By the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tsarist state had developed many of the ambitions, if not always fully realized, that scholars associate with Foucauldian governmentality, attempting to minimize risk and increase the welfare of its population.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the conquest of Turkestan transformed the Kazakh steppe into an internal province of the Russian Empire, rather than one of the frontier, a shift fraught with meaning for most commentators.<sup>11</sup>

The Russian Empire's *mission civilatrice* on the Kazakh steppe, such as it was, was fundamentally a matter of economic transformation.<sup>12</sup> Zhūt was a metonym for all the problems pastoral nomadic lifeways seemed to have. In this way, it was akin to the rhetorical sticks with which rural people have always been beaten in modernizing polities, focusing on the peasant's

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<sup>9</sup> James Vernon, *Hunger: A modern history* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007), 17-40.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," Graham Burchell *et al.*, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), 87-104. A few examples will suffice: between 1866 and 1876, all zemstvo provinces of the Russian Empire developed compulsory fire insurance programs to address the widespread destruction of peasant property in fires, c.f. Cathy A. Frierson, *All Russia is burning! A cultural history of fire and arson in late imperial Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2002) 191-192; an 1866 law created the most comprehensive food aid program that had hitherto existed in the Russian Empire, c.f. Richard Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892: the imperial government responds to a crisis* (New York: Columbia, 1975) 20-21; an 1865 law regularized and brought under state control smallpox inoculation, c.f. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, t. 40 (1865), ch. 1, no. 42375 (6 August 1865).

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. "Ob ustroistve upravleniia v Kirgizskikh stepiakh," *Turkestanskii sbornik* t. 6, 277. (Originally published in *Moskovskie vedomosti* #123, June 7, 1868.)

<sup>12</sup> Compare Alice Conklin's emphasis on *mise en valeur*, or rational development, of natural and human resources in French West Africa; Conklin, *A mission to civilize: the republican idea of empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford, 1997), 6-7. On the Russian Empire's civilizing mission see Jörg Baberowski, "Auf der Suche nach Eindeutigkeit: Kolonialismus und zivilisatorische Mission im Zarenreich und in der Sowjetunion," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47.4 (1999), 482-504; Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2005) 125, 131-47; Ricarda Vulpius, "The Russian Empire's civilizing mission in the eighteenth century: a comparative perspective," Tomohiko Uyama, ed., *Asiatic Russia: imperial power in regional and international contexts* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13-31.

ignorance and helplessness before acts of God; these claims have a functional similarity in regions as diverse as the French Alps and Bengal.<sup>13</sup> Although zhūt fit this broad typology, it was also a problem held to be inherent in nomadic lifeways. It is this linkage, as well as the particularities of the arid grasslands Kazakhs inhabited, that lends this story its local specificity. For once tsarist administrators and Russian-educated Kazakhs agreed, for their own reasons, that the pastoral nomadic economy needed to become more secure and stable, their assessments of the steppe environment and the lifeways it was capable of supporting were vital to their assessment of the necessary change. If the steppe provinces could be shown as unambiguously promising for agriculture, the response zhūt demanded was simple, if difficult to implement; if their water, soil, or climate comprised a limiting environment for agriculture, the solution would be much less straightforward. In seeking a mutually beneficial transformation of an economy they agreed was flawed, Kazakh intellectuals and tsarist administrators found a fleeting middle ground.<sup>14</sup>

This middle ground, though, was also suffused with the rhetoric of pastoralist primitivism. That dominant lens contributed to what ultimately resulted – a program of mass peasant resettlement that left the Kazakhs worse off, in many respects, than they had been in its

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<sup>13</sup> The work of local agricultural committees under S. Iu. Witte, which laid the groundwork for the Stolypin land reform, listed “unfavorable natural conditions” among the most critical factors with which Russian peasant farmers had to reckon and was devoted in part to introducing techniques to overcome them. See e.g. V. V. Biriukovich, sost., *Svod trudov mestnykh komitetov po 49 guberniiam Evropeiskoi Rossii, t. 3: sel'skokhoziaistvennaia tekhnika* (St. Petersburg: tip. V. Kirshbauma, 1903), 4; on the Alps and Pyrenees c.f. Tamara Whited, *Forests and Peasant Politics in Modern France* (New Haven: Yale, 2000); on Bengal, Darren C. Zook, “Famine in the landscape: imagining hunger in South Asian history, 1860-1990,” in Arun Agrawal and K. Sivaramakrishnan, eds., *Agrarian environments: resources, representation, and rule in India* (Durham: Duke, 2000), 107-131.

<sup>14</sup> Compare the arguments of Sergey Glebov, “Siberian Middle Ground: Languages of Rule and Accommodation on the Siberian Frontier,” Ilya Gerasimov *et al.*, eds., *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 121-151; Austin Jersild, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2002); Tomohiko Uyama, “A Strategic Alliance between Kazakh Intellectuals and Russian Administrators: Imagined Communities in *Dala Walayatining Gazeti*,” Tadayuki Hayashi, ed., *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia* (Sapporo: SRC, 2003) 237-259.

absence.<sup>15</sup> A civilizing imperative was among the arguments mobilized in its support of resettlement.<sup>16</sup> Conceiving of zhūt as a disaster, in the end, produced an intervention that was itself disastrous.

### **Zhūt as Non-Event**

For nomads, historically, zhūt was undoubtedly a serious hardship whose appearance presaged a hungry, miserable winter. But its predictability and chronic character in a system that depended on pasturing animals year-round, with little or no prepared fodder, meant that they also had ways of mitigating its worst consequences. The simplest of these was that most fundamental nomadic environmental adaptation, flight. Looking back, a Kazakh, Musa Chormanov, argued in the official press of Semipalatinsk province during the early 1870s that zhūt had never been a serious problem prior to the Russian conquest of the steppe, since Kazakhs had been able to migrate more than a thousand kilometers in search of food, at need.<sup>17</sup> Without the constraints to their land use and mobility that already existed by the time he wrote, Chormanov claimed, Kazakhs had been able to move to warm, dry areas that, because they received little precipitation, were both useless under ordinary circumstances and vital to survival in a cold, wet

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<sup>15</sup> Compare Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), which argues that “universal notions of civilization and modernity” (10) created common ground, namely the “French subjugation of indigenous society and the dissolution of the latter’s retrograde features” (11) among administrators holding otherwise different views of French imperialism.

<sup>16</sup> Resettlement, eloquently described by Nicholas Breyfogle as a form of “human landscaping” (110), has recently been the subject of increased historical interest. (Breyfogle, “Enduring Imperium: Russia/Soviet Union/Eurasia as Multiethnic, Multiconfessional Space,” *Ab Imperio* 2008.1, 75-129.) See especially Willard Sunderland, “The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was But Might Have Been,” *Slavic Review* 69.1 (Spring 2010) for an argument that Russia was, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, akin to other colonial empires in its management of space and people, and Peter Holquist, “‘In Accord with State Interests and the People’s Wishes’: The Technocratic Ideology of Russia’s Resettlement Administration,” *idem.*, 151-179, on the modernizing, technocratic imperatives resettlement reflected.

<sup>17</sup> Musa Chormanov, “Kazakhskie narodnye obychai,” republished in E. M. Aryn, glav. red., *Musa Chormanov: kazakhskie narodnye obychai* (Pavlodar: EKO, 2005) 9-10. Originally published in *Semipalatinskije oblastnye vedomosti* no. 32-37, 1871. For a classic statement of the conflict between state borders and transhumance, c.f. Nazif Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan: adaptation to closed frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1979).

winter.<sup>18</sup> Absent the ability to flee, or if the zhūt in question was of a smaller scale, Kazakhs could depend on a well-developed and, some claimed, persistent tradition of mutual aid within the clan (*rod*) in case of misfortune.<sup>19</sup> In a worst-case scenario, entire families might undertake the backbreaking labor of manually shattering the icy crust over fodder grasses, accomplishing with hammers what their animals' hooves could not.<sup>20</sup> Although some of these sources are tinged with nostalgia, their overall thrust remains clear – zhūt was far from pleasant, but it was a component part of pastoral nomadism as Kazakhs practiced it and could be solved within that system.

For their part, into the 1860s, tsarist administrators approached zhūt reactively, rather than proactively, and on a relatively small scale. Two serious zhūts in the Orenburg steppe, in 1850-51 and 1855-56 (the latter carrying off nearly a million animals), provoked no response more serious than small short-term loans of money (less than 100 silver rubles per needy village, in 1851) or grain.<sup>21</sup> This might have been expected under the “frontier” system of administration that characterized the Orenburg steppe before 1868, but the Siberian steppe was historically no different. The Semipalatinsk *kraeved* and political activist N. Ia. Konshin noted that in a zhūt of 1840-41, local administrators only provided small amounts of grain and alfalfa to their needy

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<sup>18</sup> See the discussions of reserve pastures in e.g. Älikhan Bökeikhanov, “Ovtsevodstvo v stepnom krae,” Zh. O. Artykbaev, glav. red., *A. N. Bokeikhanov: Kazakhi: istoriko-etnograficheskie trudy* (Astana: “Altyn-kitap,” 2007) 202.

<sup>19</sup> B. D Daulbaev, “Rasskaz o zhizni Kirgiz Nikolaevskogo uezda Turgaiskoi oblasti,” *Zapiski Orenburgskogo otdela imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* t. 4 (1881), 106-107.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, “Prostoi sposob bor’by s dzhutom,” *KSG* 1897 #46 (23 November).

<sup>21</sup> Russian State Historical Archive (hereafter RGIA) f. 1291, op. 81, d. 219 (1851), ll. 20-21, “O bedstviakh preterpennykh kirgizami ot neurozhaia i padezha skota”; RGIA f. 1291, op. 81, d. 233 (1856), ll. 15-16ob., “Otchet Orenburgskoi pogrannichnoi kommissii po upravleniiu Zauralskimi Kirgizami Orenburgskogo vedomstva i shkoloii dlia kirgizskikh detei”.

Kazakh subjects.<sup>22</sup> Two decades later, the leadership of the Governor-Generalship of Western Siberia, after some discussion, only found it possible to release loans totaling 300 rubles in each district under its authority.<sup>23</sup>

Historian David Bello has argued that, for the strongly comparable case of pasturage failure and relief on the Mongolian steppes of the Qing Empire, providing relief in cash and grain rather than livestock essentially “reliev[ed] Mongols of their pastoral identity in order to save it” long before Han settlement on the steppe exerted such pressure directly.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Kazakh steppe, though, such an argument both rests on an untenable assumption and misses a crucial shift in administrative thinking. Grain, as a trade good and occasionally as a supplemental crop, was never completely absent from the steppe<sup>25</sup>, nor is there clear evidence of a straightforward connection between (limited) relief subsidies and a change of lifeways. More importantly, though, there *is* evidence of a gradual change whereby zhüt relief came to be a matter of addressing what were perceived as the systematic problems of pastoral nomadism in a systematic and permanent way.

This is not to say that tsarist officials felt easy about having pastoralists as subjects.

Sedentarization of one sort or another loomed large on the agenda since the 1850s at the latest.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> N. Ia. Konshin, “Zametka ob odnom istoricheskom dzhute,” *Zapiski Semipalatinskogo pod’otdela Zapadno-sibirskogo otdela IRGO*, vyp. 2 (1905), 1-17.

<sup>23</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 9 (1862), ll. 2-3ob (Diugamel’ to Valuev, 30 May 1862), “Ob upadke u Kirgiz rogatogo skota i loshadei, i o vydache posobiia nuzhdaiushchimsia iz nikh”.

<sup>24</sup> David A. Bello, “Relieving Mongols of their pastoral identity: disaster management on the eighteenth-century Qing China Steppe,” *Environmental history* 19.3 (July 2014), 480-504 (quotation from 482).

<sup>25</sup> The classic work of P. I. Rychkov indicates that Kazakhs of the Small Horde were successfully growing grain in the mid-1700s. See Rychkov, *Topografiia Orenburgskoi gubernii* (1762; Orenburg: tip. B. Breslina, 1887) 100-101.

<sup>26</sup> A. Iu. Bykov, *Istoki modernizatsii Kazakhstana: problemy sedentarizatsii v rossiiskoi politike XVIII-nachala XX veka* (Barnaul: AzBuka, 2003) 149; Steven Sabol, “Comparing American and Russian Internal Colonization: The ‘Touch of Civilisation’ on the Sioux and Kazakhs,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 43.1 (Spring 2012), 29-51.

In 1857, principled (rather than pragmatic) support of Kazakh pastoralism among high-level tsarist administrators disappeared with the retirement of Gen. V. A. Perovskii, governor-general of Orenburg and Samara, a man whose opposition to grain cultivation by Kazakhs went so far that he reprimanded his subordinates for allowing it to occur.<sup>27</sup> While Populist commentators saw virtue in the pragmatic mobility of Slavic agriculturalists colonizing new lands, this favorable view did not extend to pastoralism as a way of life.<sup>28</sup> Pastoral mobility presented a host of problems for an undermanned and cash-strapped state. Indeed, zhūt tended to exacerbate these problems. Mass die-offs of livestock meant significant shortfalls (*nedochety*) in tax collection and, over time, made it forbiddingly difficult to assess Kazakhs with any sort of tax based on their actual wealth in livestock, which seemed neither stable nor predictable.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the General Staff officer A. K. Geins lamented that as a result of a zhūt of 1862, “hungry Kazakhs roamed about the steppe, carrying out plunder and robbery.”<sup>30</sup> If these complaints are framed by the administrative contexts that generated them, their basic thrust remains clear – nomads did not make good neighbors, nomads in times of crisis still less so. A.

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<sup>27</sup> RGIA, f. 1291, op. 82, d. 9 (1858), ll. 8-8ob., “O razvitii zemlepushchestva mezhdu kirgizami Orenburgskogo vedomstva.”

<sup>28</sup> On competing discourses surrounding peasant mobility c.f. Susi K. Frank, “‘Wandern’ als nationale Praxis des ‘mastering space’: die Entwicklung des semantischen Feldes um ‘brodiažnichestvo’ und ‘stranničestvo’ zwischen 1836 und 1918,” Karl Schlögel, ed., *Mastering Russian Spaces: Raum und Raumbewältigung als Probleme der russischen Geschichte* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2011), 73-90.

<sup>29</sup> On shortfalls: RGIA f. 1291, op. 81, d. 219 (1851), l. 30 (report of V. A. Perovskii, 14 April 1856); on unpredictability, Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereafter TsGA RKaz) f. 64, op. 1, d. 647, ll. 199ob.-200 (report of Steppe Governor-General M. A. Taube, 1899). Title of file: “Proekt polozheniia ob upravlenii oblasti Akmolinskoi, Semipalatinskoi, Ural’skoi i Turgaiskoi. Zapiska o preobrazovanii kirgizskogo narodnogo suda v stepnykh oblastiakh.” This lack of information about taxable assets led to a flat tax on each Kazakh tent, a situation similar to that described for rural communes in Yanni Kotsonis, *States of obligation: taxes and citizenship in the Russian Empire and early Soviet republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> A. K. Geins, “Kharakter upravleniia kirgizami russkoi vlast’iu,” *Sobranie literaturnykh trudov A. K. Geinsa t. 1* (St. Petersburg: tip. M. Stasiulevicha, 1897) 112.



I. Maksheev, professor of statistics at the General Staff Academy, eloquently summarized the spirit of the age in an 1856 description of the lower reaches of the Syr-Darya River:

Agriculturalists, by the very nature of their occupations, are more peace-loving than nomads. Tied to a certain area, they do not eagerly cast it off and worry only about defending themselves and their fields, as the natural sources of their existence; and for attacks they have neither time nor means. Nomadic people are another matter.<sup>31</sup>

Nomads, though, remained a threat chiefly to security and stability, and were only objects of humanitarian concern in the roughest and most *ad hoc* sense. A sense that the systemic vulnerabilities of the nomadic lifestyle required systematic solutions, and that such intervention might benefit state and population alike, had not yet developed.

### **Towards Interventionism**

As the Kazakh steppe became an internal province of the Russian Empire, and attempts were made to introduce a more uniform and active type of administration to the entire region, such attitudes slowly faded from view. The problems that zhūt presented seemed threatening to the new ambitions of the state (epitomized by the Provisional Statute of 1868) and to demand solutions both more humanitarian and more radical than anything practiced hitherto. By the late 1890s, it was possible for one keen observer of Central Asian affairs, O. A. Shkapskii, to argue that zhūt was at the very core of Kazakhs' impoverishment and that resolving the latter was, in turn, "one of the most substantial tasks of [Russia's] cultural mission in Central Asia."<sup>32</sup>

The first instance I have discovered of a transformative administrative agenda directed explicitly against zhūt comes from the early 1860s, in the writings of the General Staff officer N. I. Krasovskii. The key factor he identified in Kazakhs' vulnerability, though, and the solution he offered, differed substantially from the one that would later become hegemonic. Writing,

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<sup>31</sup> A. I. Maksheev, *Opisanie nizov'ev Syr-dar'i* (St. Petersburg: tip. Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1856) 53.

<sup>32</sup> Shkapskii, "Nekotoryia dannia," 46 (quotation), 48-49. For more on Shkapskii c.f. Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) 136-38.

significantly, in the immediate aftermath of the emancipation of the serfs in European Russia, he argued that many Kazakhs wished to have the land on which their winter camps were built recognized as private property, and that this desire should be encouraged and recognized by the imperial administration.<sup>33</sup> Doing so, he claimed, would have a series of beneficial effects: it would require fewer Kazakhs to migrate in spring and summer, since some stock could remain on pasture near the camp year-round; this larger concentration of people could prepare and store significantly more hay for winter, given several months to do so; this, in turn, would make long migrations in case of zhūt significantly less likely.<sup>34</sup> State officials, unsurprisingly, rejected such recommendations; private property in land had recently been rejected as inappropriate for the peasantry and Kazakhs were hardly considered more developed.<sup>35</sup> The Provisional Statute of 1868 would acknowledge only a theoretical right to full individual ownership of land, rarely recognized in practice.<sup>36</sup> This fundamental law presented winter camps to Kazakhs' communal use as whole cantons, and declared summer pastures state property used by Kazakhs on rights of

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<sup>33</sup> Proposals concerning the individualization of land tenure among emancipated peasants predate the emancipation and were part of discussions about the form emancipation might take. A. I. Zablotskii-Desiatovskii, for example, argued in 1851 that communal land tenure hindered rural development; see W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats 1825-1861* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois, 1982) 123-24. Also compare the treatment of then-Finance Minister M. Kh. Reutern in David A. J. Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861-1908: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois, 1987) 19 and Jacob W. Kipp, "M. Kh. Reutern on the Russian State and Economy: A Liberal Bureaucrat During the Crimean Era, 1854-60," *Journal of Modern History* 47.3 (September 1975), 437-459.

<sup>34</sup> Krasovskii, vyp. 2, 72-74.

<sup>35</sup> For maintenance of the peasant commune post-emancipation as a means of maintaining social control and supervision over peasants see e.g. P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, ed. and trans. Susan Wobst (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International press, 1978) 101; Daniel Field, *The End of Serfdom: Nobility and Bureaucracy in Russia, 1855-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1976) 347-48.

<sup>36</sup> The concern here was interference with the practice of mobile pastoralism caused by private plots of land. See RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 5c (1865), ll. 92-94ob. Title of file: "Ob''iasnitel'naia zapiska k proektu polozheniia ob upravlenii v Priural'skoi, Turgaiskoi, Akmolinsk, i Semipalatinskoi oblastei". Similar rhetoric rejecting private property in land for Russian settlers in Semirech'e is in Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereafter TsGA RK) f. 64, op. 1, d. 3, l. 7ob (proposal of late 1869, rejection of 1870).

long-term rental.<sup>37</sup> Krasovskii's proposal is notable, though, both as the starting point for a new sort of thinking about zhūt and as an indication that any sort of administrative change meant to transform pastoral nomadism would be closely connected to intellectual trends and perceptions of state interest common to the entire Empire.

At roughly the same time, provincial administrators began to put forth the idea that funds should be regularly collected to create a permanent and growing capital that would provide loans in extraordinary situations. In 1863, the Governor-General of Orenburg and Samara, A. P. Bezak, asked his direct superior, the Minister of Internal Affairs, P. A. Valuev, for permission to establish a micro-credit institution, a *ssudnaia kassa*, for the Kazakhs (mostly of the Small Horde) under his authority. He opened his proposal with a picture of a steppe, and a population, constantly beset by disaster, and an administration unequipped to deal with it:

The Kazaks of the trans-Ural region, subjected almost annually to disasters from drought, zhut [*goleleditsy*], locusts and so forth, constantly turn to the Oblast Administration of the Orenburg Kazaks with requests about monetary loans, which, although they are rendered to them as possible, from free ordinary funds [*shtatnye summy*], but only in the most insignificant size for lack of funds, and these are far from corresponding to their needs.<sup>38</sup>

Officials in Akmolinsk province repeated this concern about the necessity of immediate financial assistance, for the purchase of grain and prepared fodder, in the event of a zhūt.<sup>39</sup> (Curiously, officials from Semipalatinsk province made no mention of zhūt in their proposal,

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<sup>37</sup> *Vremennoe polozenie*, articles 210-214.

<sup>38</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 22 (1863), l. 1 (Bezak to Valuev, 12 July 1863). Title of file: "Ob uchrezhdenii pri oblastnom pravlenii Orenburgskikh Kirgizov ssudnoi kassy." On ll. 1ob.-2, Bezak cites the good example of a *ssudnaia kassa* that existed for the Kazakh Inner Horde since 1854.

<sup>39</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 26 (1879), ll. 1-2 (N. G. Kaznakov to L. S. Makov, 26 November 1879). Title of file: "Ob uchrezhdenii ssudnoi kassy dlia kirgizov Akmolinskoi oblasti".

citing instead the deleterious influence of usurers on Kazakhs during tax season.)<sup>40</sup> Motivated by humanitarian concerns, the regulations for the *ssudnye kassy*, once they were established, also drove needy Kazakhs inexorably closer to the reach of the state. These regulations, depending on the province, demanded that petitioners present written, stamped attestation (*svidetel'stvo*) from a local official<sup>41</sup>; in Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk provinces, this attestation was to include a statement that potential borrowers were registered in official books (*shnurovye aul'nye knigi*) as tent-owners in a certain village.<sup>42</sup> By the 1870s, already, the rough-and-ready method of nomadic flight from zhūt was becoming less tenable. Kazakhs who wanted real assistance could only obtain it by entering more closely into the embrace of a state that, by increasing its reach, sought to curb their mobility.

The fragmentary evidence available strongly suggests that Kazakhs made use of these new institutions once they were introduced. In 1881, governor A. P. Konstantinovich of Turgai *oblast'* (one of two provinces of the Orenburg steppe) noted that, despite severe winter conditions, the Kazakhs in one of the districts entrusted to him, Nikolaevsk, were doing fairly well, in part because of “the comparative prosperity of residents and the prosperity of the cantons of this district, where more than 26,000 rubles circulate in the *ssudnye kassy*.”<sup>43</sup> Later, reporting on the severe winter of 1897-98, another Turgai governor, Ia. F. Barabash, noted that the provincial *ssudnaia kassa* had served the largest (8,500 rubles) of several sources at his disposal

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<sup>40</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 1 (1873), ll. 2-2ob. (A. P. Khrushchov to A. E. Timashev, 14 November 1872). Title of file: “Ob utverzhdenii proekta ustava ssudnoi kassy dlia kirgizov Semipalatinskoi oblasti”.

<sup>41</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 22 (1863), ll. 4-4ob. (“Proekt polozheniia o ssudnoi kasse pri oblastnom pravlenii Orenburgskimi kirgizami”).

<sup>42</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 1 (1873), ll. 5ob.-6 (“Proekt ustava ssudnoi kassy kirgizov Semipalatinskoi oblasti”).

<sup>43</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 39 (1881), ll. 7-7ob. (report of A. P. Konstantinovich, 10 December 1881). Title of file: “Po voprosu o sposobakh prodovol'stviia skota v zimu 1881-1882 gg. v Turgaiskoi i Ural'skoi oblastiakh”.

to aid needy Kazakhs.<sup>44</sup> It is safe to conclude, at least, that for whatever reason Kazakhs began to run to the tsarist state, in the form of disaster relief from the *ssudnye kassy*, as eagerly as it reached out to them.

The *ssudnaia kassa* institutionalized and regulated relief during the provisions crisis that accompanied zhūt, providing money for the purchase of food and fodder and flour for hungry nomads. By the 1880s, it was more than an edict, but an institution on which many Kazakhs depended in extreme situations.<sup>45</sup> Still, at the same time as the *ssudnye kassy* began to flourish, officials at several levels of the administrative hierarchy began to think of solutions to zhūt in more systemic and enduring terms. Where Krasovskii's idea failed to gain traction, though, these officials saw the end of zhūt in a matter of increasing state interest – the peasant colonization of suitable areas of the Kazakh steppe.

Colonization, according to the Provisional Statute of 1868, was to take place on a free and natural, rather than an organized basis, and could be agricultural or commercial (*promyshlennaia*); the proposal from Western Siberia which served as the basis for further discussion made only vague references to “great benefits both with respect to civilization of the Kazakhs and the development among them of agriculture and other trades particular to sedentary folk.”<sup>46</sup> Later proposals, though, originating from the same region, made clear the sort of benefits Kazakhs might expect from a program of organized, if limited, Russian colonization.

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<sup>44</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 84, d. 14 (1898), ll. 6-6ob. (report of Ia. F. Barabash, 20 September 1898). Title of file: “Po voprosu ob okazanii pomoshchi postradavshemu naseleniiu Irgizskogo ueda, vsledstvie nebyvalo prodolzhitel'noi zimy 1897-1898 gg.”

<sup>45</sup> Robert Jones' depiction of Catherinian granaries is a useful reminder that aid that existed on paper was not necessarily effective, or even extant, in rural areas. See Jones, *Bread upon the waters: the St. Petersburg grain trade and the Russian economy, 1703-1811* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2013) 44.

<sup>46</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 5c (1865), ll. 101-108; RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 23 (1866), l. 2 (report of the Council of the Main Administration of Western Siberia, 20 October 1866). The Governor-General of Western Siberia, A. O. Diugamel', forwarded this report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for consideration by the Steppe Commission the following day (idem., l. 1). Title of file: “O vodvorenii russkikh zemledel'tsev v Kirgizskoi stepi Sibirskogo vedomstva.”

Already in 1876 the governor-general of Western Siberia, N. G. Kaznakov, repeated his predecessor's claim that Kazakhs learning to grow grain, rendering them no longer dependent on grain imports during zhūts, was one of the many benefits to be anticipated from "the cautious settlement [*vodvorenie*] within the Kazakh steppes of a sedentary Russian population, without constraint of the nomads."<sup>47</sup> Although the modest results of early experiments in agricultural colonization led a later governor-general, G. A. Kolpakovskii, to suspend it, the halt was only temporary, the civilizing logic inexorable.<sup>48</sup> Soon after Kolpakovskii's halt, in 1888, the majority opinion of a commission he formed to assess the prospects of peasant colonization in Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk oblasts, made the connection between zhūt prevention and resettlement explicit:

The majority of the Commission...acknowledged colonization of the Kazakh steppe by settlers from the inner provinces of Russia as desirable not only in view of the political and economic considerations expressed by the former administration of Western Siberia, but also taking into consideration the latest information about the salutary influence, which the settlement of Russian villages on the steppe could render in support of the nomads during zhūts, frequently recurring on the steppe, when stores of fodder in villages, obtained by the Kazakhs, could prevent dyings of hundreds of thousands of head of Kazakh livestock.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, well before the peak of the resettlement era, when peasant resettlement was only allotted a "subsidiary role" in the matter of economically Russianizing the steppe, assumptions about the ability of peasant colonizers to change Kazakh pastoral nomadism sufficiently to

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<sup>47</sup> Russian State Military-Historical Archive (hereafter RGVIA), f. 400, op. 1, d. 498, ll. 2 (quotation), 5ob.-6ob. (report of N. G. Kaznakov to A. E. Timashev, 20 January 1876, citing report of A. P. Khrushchov, 30 November 1874). Title of file: "O kolonizatsii okrugov Sibirskikh i Turkestarskogo."

<sup>48</sup> RGVIA f. 400, op. 1, d. 1077, ll. 2-9 (report of G. A. Kolpakovskii to N. N. Obruchev, secret, 2 May 1886). Title of file: "Vsepoddanneishii otchet stepnogo general-gubernatora o glavneishikh meropriiatiakh k blagoustroistvu stepnogo kraia".

<sup>49</sup> TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 4230, ll. 37ob.-38 (24 February 1888). Title of file: "Ob obrazovanii kommissii po kolonizatsii Akmolinskoi i Semipalatinskoi oblastei i materialy o deiatelnosti ee."

render it less disaster-prone were well, if not universally, established.<sup>50</sup> For those who viewed Slavic peasants as effective civilizers, these good neighbors would serve Kazakhs not only as a material resource, but as teachers of the techniques and habits that would prevent them and their stock from starving in the future.<sup>51</sup> As St. Petersburg's interest in resettlement as a question of state interest grew, Slavic settlers appeared in various publications (official and unofficial) on the topic as examples demonstrating the value of agriculture to Kazakhs<sup>52</sup>; sources of improved technology for harvesting hay and tilling the soil<sup>53</sup>; and as useful examples of constancy and regularity in work ethic.<sup>54</sup> For their own good, Kazakhs would have to surrender at least some land to civilizers from outside the steppe; colonization, sedentarization, and security would go hand in hand.

### **Mitigating the Threat**

A complex of negative ideas associated with pastoralism gave sedentarization a place at the heart of solutions both to the administrative concerns described above and the closely connected question of Kazakhs' impoverishment. Sedentary economies, however, may take multiple forms, and the transition to sedentarization be accomplished by a range of stimuli. The range of positive valences associated with Russian settlers on the steppe illustrates this point nicely; mowing and storing hay was more compatible with limited pastoral mobility than a large-

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<sup>50</sup> Anatolii Remnev, trans. Paul Werth, "Colonization and 'Russification' in the imperial geography of Asiatic Russia: from the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries," Uyama, ed., *Asiatic Russia*, 102-128 (quote on 114).

<sup>51</sup> For the panoply of views around Slavic peasants as a civilizing force c.f. A. V. Remnev and N. G. Suvorova, "'Obrusenie' aziatskikh okrain Rossiiskoi imperii: optimizm i pessimizm russkoi kolonizatsii," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 11/129 (2008), 132-179.

<sup>52</sup> P. Khvorostanskii, "Kirgizskii vopros v sviazi s kolonizatsiei stepi," *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 1 (1907) 81.

<sup>53</sup> I. P. Poddubnyi, "Etnograficheskie ocherk," *Aziatskaia Rossiia t. 1: liudi i poriadki za Uralom* (1914; Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1974) 160.

<sup>54</sup> Shcherbina and E. Dobovol'skii, *MPKZ t. 3 – Akmolinskaia oblast', Akmolinskii uezd* (Chernigov: tip. G. M. Veseloi, 1909) 129-130.

scale shift to agriculture. Such variation meant that the specific nature of the economic transformation zhūt was understood to necessitate was contested within a matrix of political priorities and knowledges of the steppe environment.

*Agriculture and Adaptation*<sup>55</sup>

That agriculture was the preeminent and preferable means of struggling against zhūt, and securing Kazakhs' existence more broadly, was the editorial line of the official *Kazakh Steppe Newspaper* (published 1888-1902).<sup>56</sup> The author of an unsigned editorial remarked:

One must rejoice at the development of agriculture among the Kazakhs first, because grain cultivation is in many cases a more reliable and lucrative occupation than stock raising; second, because with the development of agriculture for feeding a family much less land is needed than in the case when means for life are gotten exclusively with the help of stock-raising.<sup>57</sup>

A year later, an anonymous review of a collection of articles about Siberia approvingly noted, "Sooner or later the Kazakhs will have to introduce agriculture to their economy, as a better means of securing life."<sup>58</sup> If zhūt sometimes only loomed *sotto voce* in this rhetoric of reliability and security, at other times it became quite an explicit factor motivating the transition to agriculture. Nowhere was this connection clearer than in the words of an obscure Russian commentator, M. Inshenetskii, in 1891:

To have herds is a good thing but not durable [*prochnoe*], and if someone has herds of various stock, and then also starts to do agriculture, then that person's herd will also be better protected, for all fodder will be much, whole mountains of wheat straw will pile

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<sup>55</sup> Pey-Yi Chu, "Encounters with Permafrost: The Rhetoric of Conquest and Practices of Adaptation in the Soviet Union," this volume, defines adaptation as "a fraught but ever-present and ongoing process of responding to dynamic constraints presented by the environment." This seems a useful lens for understanding the position of committed agriculturalists on the Kazakh steppe.

<sup>56</sup> On the establishment of this newspaper see TsGA RK f. 64, op. 1, d. 5378.

<sup>57</sup> KSG 1894 no. 2, "Po voprosu o khlebopashestve v kirgizskikh stepiakh."

<sup>58</sup> KSG 1895 no. 1.



up, and with this fodder there is nothing to fear from zhūt; during any misfortune, Mother Earth [*zemlia-matushka*] will rescue him from any need.<sup>59</sup>

An enviable picture, no doubt, particularly when juxtaposed against the prosperous peasant of Imshenetskii's depiction, and in light of the fabulous harvests he claimed it was possible to reap from steppe land.

The *KSG* was, as Tomohiko Uyama has argued, a cooperative enterprise, and to further that impression, its editors happily reprinted letters from Kazakhs who had made successful attempts to sow grain and chastised letter-writers who argued against the necessity of agriculture.<sup>60</sup> In light of the apparently uneven quality of agricultural land on the steppe, though, a range of commentators proposed adaptive measures to support grain cultivation in dry areas with thin soil. Some commentators in the *KSG* invested much hope in a varietal of spring wheat called *chul-bidai* ("desert wheat"), reputed to give a good harvest even during drought years<sup>61</sup>; others promoted a program of large-scale afforestation and expansion of irrigation deep into the steppe as a means of sustaining agriculture.<sup>62</sup> Transforming the climate and landscape of the steppe held out the promise that Kazakhs could change their occupation to one less vulnerable to natural caprice, which zhūt seemed to epitomize. Long after the *KSG* closed in 1902, a faction of the Kazakh *intelligentsia* continued to promote this line of thinking. The group that formed

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<sup>59</sup> M. Imshenetskii, "Nesmetnoe bogatstvo, sokrytoe v kirgizskoi stepi," *KSG* 1891 #2 (1 January).

<sup>60</sup> Amre Nogerbekov, "Moi zaniatiia khlebopashestvom," *KSG* 1894 no. 49; unsigned, "Eshche raz o preimushchestvakh zemledel'cheskogo khoziaistva," *KSG* 1894, no. 22.

<sup>61</sup> A. Kurmanbaev, "K voprosu o chul-bidae," *KSG* 1894, no. 22; correspondence selected from other newspapers reported on its successful importation and use in other dry regions of the empire, e.g. *KSG* 1895, no. 12. Discussion of the adaptability of "chul wheat" is also in Mark Alfred Carleton, *The Small Grains* (New York: Macmillan, 1920) 168. "Chul" ("cho'l," in modern Uzbek) refers to a desert or barren place – thanks to Maya Peterson for the reminder.

<sup>62</sup> St. Artemenko, "Ob iskusstvennom oblesenii stepei," *KSG* 1894, no. 4; Shkapskii, "Nekotoryia dannyia" part 2, 45, 48. The most comprehensive study of the politics and praxis of irrigation in Central Asia is Maya K. Peterson, "Technologies of Rule: Empire, Water, and the Modernization of Central Asia, 1867-1941" (Diss. Harvard University, 2011).

around the Troitsk journal *Ai-qap* (1911-1915) tended to disassociate Kazakhness from pastoral nomadism as a means of increasing ordinary Kazakhs' civilizational level and prosperity. Like the official newspaper before them, they publicized cases of successful transitions to agriculture, as among Kazakhs living on the Baraba steppe of western Siberia. Having taken good land, these Kazakhs were able to market an agricultural surplus and sell copious amounts of hay during the zhūt years that threatened their nomadic neighbors. Investing their profits in cultural institutions and thus raising their own cultural level, these Kazakhs' activities were a "very pleasing thing to hear [*qulaq suisinerlik is*]." <sup>63</sup> Risk mitigation and civilization through sedentary agriculture, then, was a matter on which aggressive advocates of resettlement and autonomist Kazakh intellectuals, albeit for very different reasons and envisioning very different agents, could agree.

Many of these adaptive solutions rested more on imperial institutions and personnel (seed banks, agricultural schools, engineers, and agronomists) than the mass movement of peasant *Kulturträgers* to the steppe. Moreover, well into the 1890s, the majority of peasants moving to the steppe were irregular migrants (*samovol'tsy*), and the steppe provinces were briefly closed to official migration. <sup>64</sup> However, the institutions organized to manage resettlement affairs – the Siberian Railroad Committee, in 1892, succeeded by the Resettlement Administration in 1896 – provided an *ex post facto* justification for peasant colonization and helped to organize its further course. Reporting to Nicholas II on the state of resettlement in 1896, the head of the Committee, A. N. Kulomzin, although distrusting the character of the illegals, also found them enterprising

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<sup>63</sup> Meiram Ysraqov, "Qala bolushylar," in U. Subkhanberdina and S. Däuitov, sost., "*Aiqap*" (Almaty: Qazaq entsiklopediiasy, 1995), 201-202.

<sup>64</sup> George Demko, *The Russian Colonization of Kazakhstan, 1896-1916* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1969) 59 estimates that 2/3 of settlers in the northern steppe between 1894 and 1903 had arrived without permission.

and endorsed the “higher” forms of economic practice they introduced where they settled.<sup>65</sup> After the turn of the century, officials and statisticians in the employ of the Resettlement Administration, especially in the pages of its semi-official journal, *Voprosy kolonizatsii* (*Questions of Colonization*), also presented Slavic peasants as “a kind of cultural or agricultural instructor to native easterners, particularly nomads.”<sup>66</sup> For many, Slavic peasants were necessary agents in the agricultural transformation of the steppe. Moreover, they represented a means of securing the well-being of the Kazakh population on the relative cheap. In 1894, the Governor-General of the Steppe, M. A. Taube, an advocate of restricted colonization only, summarized the opinion of governors under him on the organization of grain storage for Kazakhs in a report to the Minister of Internal Affairs, I. N. Durnovo; the measure, costing nearly two million rubles per province, would be practically unrealizable, and meanwhile, he argued, the increased settlement of peasants on the steppe “eliminated the necessity, at least for now, of establishing grain storage in the steppe.”<sup>67</sup> For both of these reasons, resettlement and climactic variation in the steppe provinces were closely intertwined.

At the same time, although agricultural colonization seemed to many to serve state interests, protect Kazakhs from disaster, and prod Kazakhs along the hierarchy of civilizational development all societies were to traverse, other observers were deeply anxious about the extent to which the steppe environment could ever support agriculture. Nor was it clear that intensified,

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<sup>65</sup> Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton, 1957), 116-19; on the SRC’s role in pursuing a Russianizing agenda see Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), 153-166.

<sup>66</sup> Willard Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question’: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48.2 (2000), 210-232. The quotation, with an extensive bibliography of works endorsing this viewpoint, is on p. 224.

<sup>67</sup> RGIA f. 1291, op. 82, d. 34 (1893), ll. 22ob-23, “O merakh obezpecheniia narodnogo prodovol’stviia kochevogo naseleniia Stepnykh oblastei.” Report of 13 September 1894.

risk-free stock-raising would be any less in the state interest than agriculture. An unlikely alliance of local scholars and Russian-trained Kazakh intellectuals made exactly this argument – though here, too, a positive role for settlers could not always be written out of the story.

*Perfecting Pastoralism?*

Following a severe zhūt in 1892, the military governor of Akmolinsk province, N. I. Sannikov, came to extremely negative conclusions about the state of nomadic stock-raising there. In a circular to district chiefs (*uezdnye nachal'niki*) and veterinary doctors, he argued that the root cause of Kazakhs' poverty and vulnerability consisted "in the very irrational management of the steppe economy, in the ignorance of the Kazakh-nomads themselves, and their inability to adapt to their changing life conditions."<sup>68</sup> Sannikov considered this situation unacceptable, in turn, because it jeopardized the steppe region's position in the increasingly integrated imperial economy, which included supplying industrial workers with meat and cavalry units with mounts.<sup>69</sup> He also noted that the pastoralist *status quo* had a deleterious influence on nomads' own wellbeing. In this view, improving the welfare of individual pastoralists and incorporating them into the movement of goods and people around the empire went hand-in-hand. What is absent from Sannikov's circular, however, is any mention of peasant colonizers in effecting this transformation. Rather, he advocated a broad-based educational program, in which district chiefs and veterinarians were asked to explain to Kazakhs the deficiencies of stock-raising as currently done, model Kazakh pastoralists would be presented to the Steppe Governor-General for awards, and *Kazakh Steppe Newspaper* would also play an important role.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *KSG* 1893, nos. 7-8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* On attempts to improve Central Asian horse-keeping for, in particular, the imperial cavalry, and the resulting intersections between metropolitan and local knowledge practices see Carole Ferret, "Des chevaux pour l'empire," *Cahiers d'Asie central* 17/18 (2009), 211-253.

<sup>70</sup> *KSG* 1893, nos. 7-8.

In accordance with Sannikov's instructions, *Kazakh Steppe Newspaper* began devoting additional column-inches to problems of animal husbandry the following year. Most prominent in this effort was a series of columns by V. Mikhailov, head of the veterinary personnel of Akmolinsk province, entitled, in the newspaper's usual didactic mode, "Conversations on Stock-Raising" (*Besedy o skotovodstve*).<sup>71</sup> Having recently noted in the journal of the local branch of the RGO that Kazakh stock-raising was "done in the most primitive way and wholly left to the conditions of nature," such that "all forms of adversity, such as storms and zhūt...[were] evident in the wellbeing of the Kazakhs,"<sup>72</sup> Mikhailov kept to a similar line in his column. The flaws he identified among local pastoralists were numerous, and included a relative lack of orientation towards the demands of the consumer markets of European Russia and Siberia; vulnerability to epizootics and wolves; and above all zhūt, held responsible for starvation, premature births, and the deaths of newborn animals.<sup>73</sup> The solutions he advocated, though, were of a piece both with what Sannikov had indicated the previous year and what other observers either dubious about agriculture's potential on the steppe, keen to retain the advantages that a developed animal-husbandry sector could provide, or both, advocated. Chief among these was obligatory communal storage of hay for winter, stocked with hay that Kazakhs would gather themselves in nearby marshlands, to keep young and weak livestock alive.<sup>74</sup> *Kazakh Steppe Newspaper* featured correspondents, like Mikhailov, advocating fodder storage, and offered its readers

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<sup>71</sup> *KSG* 1894, no. 1 is the first of several columns under this rubric.

<sup>72</sup> V. Mikhailov, "Kirgizskie stepi Akmolinskoi oblasti (po obsledovaniiam veterinarnykh vrachei)," *Zapiski Zapadno-Sibirskogo otdela IRGO* kn. 16, vyp. 1 (Omsk: 1893), 20.

<sup>73</sup> *KSG* 1894, nos. 4, 6, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Sannikov, *KSG* 1893 nos. 7-8; Mikhailov, "Besedy o skotovodstve (V)," *KSG* 1894 no. 13; anonymous, "V chem spasenie ot 'dzhuta,'" *KSG* 1894 no. 5.

detailed advice about how best to do so.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in neighboring Turgai province, the veterinarian A. I. Dobrosmyslov saw little hope for agriculture in the soil of the province, lacking humus-rich *chernozem* and quickly growing exhausted,<sup>76</sup> and praised the efforts of the military governor, Ia. F. Barabash, to introduce obligatory hay storage after the zhūt of 1891-92.<sup>77</sup> This too would involve at least partial sedentarization, returning to fixed points to store hay and sheltering animals in at least semi-permanent dwellings. As provincial and district borders were drawn on the steppe and sedentary farmers claimed land permanently, the days of migrating from the feathergrass pastures of the northern steppe to the Syr-Darya river in search of open pasture were, by the 1890s, over.

Many Kazakhs argued along similar lines. The ethnographer and pedagogue Ibrai Altynsarin, in direct response to the catastrophic zhūt of 1879-80, took to the pages of *Orenburgskii listok (Orenburg Leaflet)* with a unique program for dealing with the crisis. Altynsarin rejected the connection between vulnerability to acts of God and pastoralism, noting that the district city of Turgai “bears adversity just the same as the Kazakhs do,”<sup>78</sup> and took a dim view of peasant colonization on the steppe; at the same time, he expressed a desire not to “condemn [*obrech*] the Kazakhs to eternal nomadic life.”<sup>79</sup> The way forward, in his mind, was

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<sup>75</sup> KSG 1892 no. 9, no. 43 (anonymous, “O kormovykh sredstvakh dlia skota”).

<sup>76</sup> TsGA RK, f. 64, op. 1, d. 4437, l. 46ob., “Broshiura ‘Obshchii vyvod o skotovodstve kirgiz Turgaiskoi oblasti’ i perepiska po etomu voprosu” (1895).

<sup>77</sup> A. I. Dobrosmyslov, “Turgaiskaia oblast’: istoricheskii ocherk,” *Zapiski Orenburgskogo otdela IRGO*, vyp. 17 (Tver’: N. M. Rodionova, 1902), 488. Reporting on the assemblies leading to this decision can be found at KSG 1893, no. 12.

<sup>78</sup> A similar claim by a Kazakh, Makash Tulemysov, that both “agriculture and stock-raising depend on God” called forth a strident defense of the preferences of agriculture in KSG 1894, no. 22.

<sup>79</sup> I. Altynsarin, “Po povodu goloda v Kirgizskoi stepi” in B. Suleimenov, glav. red., *Ibrahim Altynsarin: sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* [hereafter SSIA], t. 2 (Alma-ata: Nauka, 1975-78) 100. Contrast the endorsement of peasant settlement in the same newspaper, “Zaselenie kirgizskikh stepei” (24 October 1882), A. V. Amelin,

a form of intensified and market-oriented stock raising, which would later be complemented by a system of vocational schools focused on processing locally-available animal products that Altynsarin himself played a role in introducing.<sup>80</sup> Such a system, in Altynsarin's mind, leveraged both the natural conditions of the steppe and the knowledge of stock-raising in the Kazakh population. The second generation of the Kazakh intelligentsia, sharing Altynsarin's positive evaluation of sedentarism (and their hands forced by years of land seizures for peasants),<sup>81</sup> came to argue for the expansion of vocational schools as a means of giving impoverished Kazakhs the skills they needed to recover financially from a zhüt.<sup>82</sup> In advocating agriculture and modified pastoralism alike as responses to zhüt, Kazakhs and tsarist bureaucrats could – and did – find common ground.

Nor were peasant colonists necessarily to be the agents with whose help Kazakhs modified their stock-raising. Sannikov made no mention of colonization, and Altynsarin argued against it; after the turn of the century, a regional scholar in Semipalatinsk province, B. Benkevich, argued that Kazakhs were already perfectly conscious of the benefits of cutting hay, quite able to store it on their own, and that the best way to further improve their stock raising was “significant restriction of colonization, so as to preserve pastures for animal husbandry.”<sup>83</sup> But for enthusiastic advocates of resettlement, peasant colonists were precisely the cultural force the

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*Natsional'nye men'shinstva v Orenburzh'e (khronika obshchestvennoi i kul'turnoi zhizni po materialam periodicheskoi pechati kontsa XIX – nachala XX vv.)* (Orenburg: OGAU, 2003) 18.

<sup>80</sup> SSIA t. 2, “Zapiska na imia voennogo gubernatora Turgaiskoi obl., ‘O vvedenii professionalno-tekhnicheskogo obucheniia v dvukhklassnykh russko-kazakhskikh shkolakh’” (27 September 1884), 190-200.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Rottier, “The Kazakness of sedentarization: promoting progress as tradition in response to the land problem,” *Central Asian Survey* 22.1 (March 2003), 67-81.

<sup>82</sup> Mirzhaqip Dulatov, “Öner mektebi,” reprinted in U. Subkhanberdina et al., “*Qazaq*” *gazeti: Alash azamattarining rukhina baghyshstaladi* (Almaty: “Qazaq entsiklopediiasi,” 1998), 222. Originally published in *Qazaq* no. 141, 15 July 1915.

<sup>83</sup> B. Benkevich, “Kirgizskoe stepnoe skotovodstvo i mery k ego uluchsheniia,” *Zapiski Semipalatinskogo pod'otdela Zapadno-sibirskogo otdela IRGO*, vyp. 1 (1903), 1-24 (quotation from 22).

Kazakhs needed to improve themselves. Though they favored agriculture where possible, members of the tsarist Resettlement Administration also noted, with evident pleasure, that the proximity of settlers doubled Kazakhs' hay-mowing and consumption in one specific case<sup>84</sup>, and that in general after extreme winter weather Kazakhs sought the "protection of Russian settlements," settling near them, mowing hay, and building more permanent dwellings.<sup>85</sup>

This humanitarian justification for colonization left open the possibility that colonization, and the modernization of the late-tsarist economy that was to come with it, would someday become a matter of greater state interest than protecting Kazakhs and their livestock. This was still more the case because only a few isolated local voices expressed the idea that Kazakhs' stock-raising could remain unchanged. In fact, in the era of peak resettlement after 1906, when there were particularly few restrictions on settlers' movement, colonization won out. Two examples from the work of the Resettlement Administration illustrate this point nicely.<sup>86</sup> One commentator looked, with some regret, on the economy of the Kazakhs of southern Ural'sk province. Living in a desert, the environment that surrounded them militated against both agriculture and intensified stock-raising, but the importance of colonization in the northern part of the province militated against granting them meadow lands for hay-mowing there. The only solution possible was to grant them summer migration rights to areas settlers would never make use of, along with the establishment of an insurance program for which local administration

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<sup>84</sup> Al. Uspenskii, "Vliianie kolonizatsii na kirgizskoe khoziaistvo (po dannym povtornogo izsledovaniia Arakaragaiskoi volosti, Kustanaiskogo uezda, Turgaiskoi oblasti, proizvedennogo L. N. Tsabelem)," *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 2 (1907), 29-43 (c.f. especially p. 40).

<sup>85</sup> G. Chirkin, "Zemleustroistvo Kirgiz v sviazi s kolonizatsiei stepi," *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 2 (1907), 44-68 (quotation from 54).

<sup>86</sup> New regulations in early 1906 granted all peasants the right to migrate where they chose and receive state assistance in doing so. On the hopes and anxieties associated with this measure see Charles Steinwedel, "Resettling People, Unsettling the Empire: Migration and the Challenge of Governance," Nicholas Breyfogle *et al.*, eds., *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 128-147.



would bear responsibility.<sup>87</sup> The important business of “improving” nomads paled before the needs of peasant settlers and of Kazakhs who, under their influence and in more favorable environmental circumstances, had made the transition to agriculture.

Not coincidentally, the case was even stronger in the cradle of resettlement on the Kazakh steppe, Akmolinsk province. There, the 1907 statistical expedition of V. K. Kuznetsov gave mathematically precise evidence that the future of the northern steppe had to be agricultural and chiefly Slavic. Kuznetsov’s count, dismissed by the statistician and autonomist politician Älikhan Bökeikhanov as a “lie” (*ötirik*), sharply reduced the minimum amount of land not subject to seizure from Kazakh pastoralists for the sake of peasant settlers.<sup>88</sup> His aggressive calculations left a bare minimum of room for the intensified stock-raising and adaptation to zhüt that Kazakhs and local agronomists alike had advocated:

There remains therefore only one possibility [for continued support of stock-raising] – to strengthen hay mowing on the steppe. But this cannot be done quickly, and with the long duration of the process the quantity of steppes in the Kazakhs’ use, as a consequence of land seizures, will decrease. Together with this will also decrease the possibility of expanding hay mowing on the steppe. All this indicates that the further development of Kazakh stock-raising must meet with an obstacle in the form of deficiency of hay mowing lands for winter fodder stores.<sup>89</sup>

Stock-raising, in this view, could never be intensified enough to accommodate the needs of land-hungry settlers, now a greater priority than any benefit pastoralists could provide the empire in meat, skin, and mounts. Kazakhs could neither remain as they were nor count on hanging on to enough land to support livestock through difficult times in their accustomed

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<sup>87</sup> B. Skalov, “Estestvenno-istoricheskie usloviia i khoziaistvo kirgiz iuzhnykh volostei Temirskogo uezda,” *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 6 (1910), 261-300.

<sup>88</sup> Ä. Bökeikhanov, “Zhuap khat,” M. Q. Qoigeldiev, red., *Alash qozghalısı: qūzhattar men materialdar zhinaghy* (Almaty: “Alash,” 2004) 151. According to Bökeikhanov, this new norm “cut off the Kazakhs’ nose” (*qazaqtı pūshıtıtip*). Originally published in *Qazaq* no. 51, 14 February 1914. My own analysis of Kuznetsov’s materials confirms the presence of either serious errors or deliberate obfuscations.

<sup>89</sup> V. Kuznetsov, *Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo v Akmolinskoi oblasti, t. 1 – Kokchetavskii uezd. Povtornoie issledovanie 1907 g.* (St. Petersburg: 1909) 111.

numbers. The remaining option was to farm on whatever areas were left after settlers were fully allotted. What this meant in light of other indications about the difficulty of growing grain on the steppe was a question Kuznetsov never answered. Within three decades, as political circumstances evolved, humanitarian intervention in Kazakhs' lives had become extensive and disastrous expropriation.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the multiple meanings that might have been attributed to it, zhūt, the freezing over of fodder grasses and the starvation of livestock that ensued from it, came to have just one in the late Russian Empire. Under imperial eyes, it was above all a clear marker of the inherent instability of pastoral nomadic lifeways. Although this strongly implied that zhūt also signified the need to improve the economy of steppe Kazakhs, there was less certainty about how this was to be accomplished. This impulse towards economic improvement, moreover, can be historicized, dating to the late 1860s – it was the product of a cognitive shift away from favoring non-intervention in the borderlands, as a means of preventing rebellion, towards programs that, if understaffed and insufficiently funded, had in mind improving the health and welfare of the nomadic population. In a region that did not even boast canton-level imperial schools until the 1880s, this was the main thrust of the *mission civilatrice*.

The various programs mooted to prevent the worst consequences of zhūt represented a series of attempts to force evolutionist ideas about pastoral life and unease about the developmental constraints the steppe environment represented into a coherent plan of action. The political climate of the Russian Empire from the 1880s on meant it was always likely that this solution would center on peasant colonization of one sort or another, but alternative views were possible and articulated in multiple spheres. Such alternatives are a useful reminder of the

contingency and indeterminacy of Russian imperialism on the Kazakh steppe. All such alternatives, however, involved a transformation, the idea that Kazakh practices as they were had to be changed for the better. As an adjunct to such arguments, zhūt contributed to changes in the steppe not in short bursts every ten to twelve years, but constantly, gradually, and inexorably.

However, public and administrative discourses, and practices aligned with them, are only the beginning of the story. Cathy A. Frierson, in a study of the meanings and practices associated with fire in rural parts of European Russia, emphasizes that fire, beyond its symbolic meaning, was “a quantifiable factor in imperial Russia’s and the Russian peasantry’s economic condition.”<sup>90</sup> If zhūt’s place in imperial discourse about the Kazakh steppe was in many ways analogous to the place of fire in descriptions of rural Russia, so too did its material effects have far-reaching consequences. Both fire and zhūt were forces of nature to which vulnerability represented backwardness, and the successful struggle with which promised a more prosperous and secure existence. And ice on the steppe, like fire, transcended the discursive in its significance; grass froze, animals died, people moved around. In the case of zhūt, though, the meaning that bureaucratic actors made of the natural world and the immediate consequences of the phenomenon, including poverty, temporary sedentarization, and reduced land use, formed a particularly inauspicious conjunction for Kazakh pastoralists. As a rising tide of peasant migrants (some fleeing climactic misfortune of their own) flooded the steppe in the 1890s, many Kazakhs were both vulnerable economically and forced to compete for land with the very people who, in some understandings, were supposed to “civilize” them.<sup>91</sup> The zhūt and famine of 1891-

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<sup>90</sup> Frierson, *All Russia is Burning*, 7.

<sup>91</sup> On the famine of 1891-92 in European Russia see Robbins, *Famine in Russia*; for claims that some settlers to the steppe were fleeing agrarian crisis at home, Ihor Stebelsky, “The Frontier in Central Asia,” James H. Bate and R. A. French, eds., *Studies in Russian Historical Geography*, vol. 1 (New York: Academic Press, 1983) 159, 165; for connections between the famine and global climactic fluctuations, Davis, *Late Victorian*, 121.

92 provide an exciting opportunity to pursue a research direction that Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch raise, but ultimately eschew, by seeing peasant and Kazakh migrations as entangled, bringing forward “their simultaneity, spatial convergence, and even mutual constitution.”<sup>92</sup> Further research will clarify the multiple intersections among governmental policy, climactic shifts, and transhumance at this key juncture in the history of the imperial steppe.

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<sup>92</sup> Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad is my native land: repertoires and regimes of migration in Russia's twentieth century* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2014) 8.