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## TSARIST RUSSIA'S CIVILIZING MISSION AND POLICY OF CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE KAZAKHS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19<sup>th</sup> AND BEGINNING OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* The study explores tsarist Russia's civilizing mission and Christianizing policy of the Kazakhs in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The relevance and significance of the research problem lie in the fact that religious conversion of non-Russian populations of the empire to Orthodoxy constituted the backbone of Russia's civilizing mission in the steppe in this period. Like other European colonial empires, tsarist Russia sought cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious homogenization of its culturally diverse populations. Hence, it is essential to consider how this policy was implemented in the Kazakh steppe and what outcomes it generated. *Purpose and objectives of the study.* The aim of the study is to look into tsarist Russia's civilizing mission and religious policy in the Kazakh steppe. The objectives are to consider and analyze how and why tsarist Russia shifted from the policy of Islamizing the Kazakhs to Christianizing efforts in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, look into a deep paradigm change among Russian political elite and officials regarding Russia's civilizing mission, attempts to remove Islam and the Tatars cultural influence from the steppe, efforts to baptize the Kazakhs and the outcome of this policy. *Materials and methods.* The study uses a comparative analysis, the method of cause and effect, and a critical discourse analysis, which allow for a thorough analysis and examination of different aspects of tsarist Russia's civilizing mission and Christianizing policy in the steppe. *Results.* The findings of the study demonstrate that despite an ambitious agenda of civilizing and Christianizing the Kazakhs in this period, due to limitations of tsarist Russia's capabilities and other contextual constraints, all efforts to baptize the nomads induced meager results. Achieving cultural and religious transformation of the Kazakhs towards Christianity and Russification proved to be both unlikely and impractical. *Conclusion.* The study concludes that due to the evident and observable errors in knowledge production about the religious affiliation and identity of the Kazakhs, Russian colonial authorities and missionaries failed to generate any far-reaching sustainable results in baptizing the Kazakhs.

**Keywords:** tsarist Russia, Kazakhs, nomads, Russians, Tatars, Islam, Christianity, Orthodoxy, baptizing, civilizing mission.

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## XIX ҒАСЫРДЫҢ ЕКІНШІ ЖАРТЫСЫ МЕН XX ҒАСЫР БАСЫНДАҒЫ ПАТШАЛЫҚ РЕСЕЙДІҢ ӨРКЕНИЕТТІК МИССИЯСЫ МЕН ҚАЗАҚТАРДЫ ШОҚЫНДЫРУ САЯСАТЫ

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**Аңдатпа.** *Kіріспе.* Мақалада XIX ғ. екінші жартысы мен XX ғ. басы аралығындағы кезеңдегі патшалық Ресейдің өркениеттік миссиясы мен қазақтарды шоқындыру саясаты жан-жақты қарастырылып, талданады. Зерттеу тақырыбының өзектілігі мен маңызы ең алдымен қазақтарды шоқындыру саясаты патшалық Ресейдің өркениеттік миссиясының негізін құрауымен тікелей байланысты. Патшалық Ресей империяның құрамындағы алуан түрлі халықтарды мәдени, этникалық, тілдік және діни жағынан біртұтас етуге айрықша мән берді. Осыған орай патшалық Ресейдің бұл бағыттағы саясатының қазақ даласында жүзеге асқанын зерттеу аса маңызды. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Патшалық Ресейдің қазақ даласындағы өркениеттік миссиясы мен шоқындыру саясатын зерттеу бұл мақаланың мақсаты болып табылады. Патшалық Ресейдің қазақ даласындағы саясатының қазақтарды исламдандырудан шоқындыруға қарай ойысуы, орыстың саяси элитасы мен шенеуніктері арасында Ресейдің өркениеттік миссиясына қатысты дискурстарының өзгеруі, даладағы ислам мен татарлардың мәдени ықпалын жою, қазақтарды шоқындыру саясаты және оның нәтижесі сынды іргелі мәселелерді қарастырып, талдау бұл мақаланың міндеттері саналады. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеу аясында ғылыми еңбектерге шолу жасау, түп деректерге талдау жасау, салыстырмалы талдау, себеп-салдары әдісі және сыни дискурс талдау сынды әдіс-тәсілдер қолданылды. Бұл зерттеу әдістерінің тақырыпты тереңнен әрі жан-жақты талдап, баға берудегі маңызы ерекше. *Нәтижелер.* Зерттеу нәтижелері патшалық Ресейдің қазақ даласындағы өркениеттік миссиясы мен христиан дінін тарату бағытында ауқымды міндеттерге қол жеткізуге ұмтылуына қарамастан, империяның мүмкіндіктерінің шектеулігі мен өзге де қосалқы кедергілер салдарынан қазақтарды шоқындыру бағытындағы саясат ешбір нәтиже бермеді. Қазақтарды мәдени және діни жағынан шоқындырып, орыстандырудың мүмкін емес екенін айқындалды. *Қорытынды.* Зерттеу қазақтардың діни сенімі мен болмысы туралы мағлұматты өндірудегі айқын қателіктердің салдарынан Ресейдің отаршылдық билігі мен миссионерлері қазақтарды шоқындыруда қандай да бір қомақты нәтижеге қол жеткізе алмады деген қорытындыға келді.

**Түйін сөздері:** патшалық Ресей, қазақтар, көшпенділер, орыстар, татарлар, ислам, христиандық, православие, шоқындыру, өркениеттік миссия.

**Дәйексөз үшін:** Жұматай Ғ.Б., Ысқақ А.С. XIX ғ. екінші жартысы мен XX ғ. басындағы патшалық Ресейдің өркениеттік миссиясы мен қазақтарды шоқындыру саясаты (шетелдік тарихнамаға шолу) // Отан тарихы. 2026. Т. 29. № 1. 91–106-бб. [ағылшын тілінде]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718\_2026\_29\_1\_91-106

## ЦИВИЛИЗАТОРСКАЯ МИССИЯ ЦАРСКОЙ РОССИИ И ПОЛИТИКА ХРИСТИАНИЗАЦИИ КАЗАХОВ ВО ВТОРОЙ ПОЛОВИНЕ XIX И НАЧАЛЕ XX ВЕКОВ

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* В статье рассматривается цивилизаторская миссия и политика христианизации царской России в отношении казахов во второй половине XIX и начале XX веков. Актуальность и значимость исследовательской проблемы заключаются в том, что обращение казахов в православие составляло основу цивилизаторской миссии России в этот период. Царская Россия стремилась к культурной, этнической, языковой и религиозной гомогенизации населения империи. Следовательно, необходимо исследовать, как эта политика осуществлялась в казахской степи и какие результаты она принесла. *Цель и задачи исследования.* Цель исследования – изучить цивилизаторскую миссию и религиозную политику царской России в казахской степи. Задачи исследования заключаются в рассмотрении и анализе того, как и почему царская Россия во второй половине XIX века перешла от политики исламизации казахов к христианизации, изучении глубоких изменений в дискурсах российской политической элиты и чиновников относительно цивилизаторской миссии России, попытки искоренить ислам и татарское культурное влияние в степи, усилий по крещению казахов и результатов этой политики. *Материалы и методы.* В исследовании используются сравнительный анализ, метод причинно-следственной связи и критический дискурсивный анализ, что позволяет провести тщательный анализ различных аспектов цивилизаторской миссии царской России в степи. *Результаты.* Результаты исследования показывают, что, несмотря на амбициозную политику христианизации казахов в этот период, из-за ограниченности потенциала царской России и других факторов все усилия по крещению кочевников привели к незначительным результатам. Достижение культурной и религиозной трансформации казахов в сторону христианства и русификации оказалось маловероятным. *Заключение.* В исследовании делается вывод, что из-за очевидных и наблюдаемых ошибок в формировании знаний о религиозной принадлежности и идентичности казахов российские колониальные власти и миссионеры не смогли добиться каких-либо результатов в крещении казахов. **Ключевые слова:** царская Россия, казахи, кочевники, русские, татары, ислам, христианство, православие, крещение, цивилизаторская миссия.

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**Introduction.** The study investigates the religious policy of tsarist Russia within the framework of the concept of a “civilizing mission” and attempts to baptize the Kazakhs through administrative measures and active missionary efforts in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This topic is highly relevant and important in a sense that religion, in particular conversion of non-Russian populations to Christianity constituted the backbone of Russia’s civilizing mission in the steppe. The problem with Russia’s religious policy was that although Christianization of aliens (*inorodtsy*) lied at the core of Russian colonial policy in the eastern and southern frontier areas, under the reign of Catherine II and her heirs up to the 1860s, Russian colonial authorities had increasingly invested in bringing the Kazakhs closer to Islam through the top-down state-orchestrated Islamization of the steppe. For over several decades, Russian colonial authorities

had tried to subdue and civilize the Kazakhs through Islam but not Christianity. Enlightened Russian rulers came to see Islam as a civilizing force through which they believed that it was feasible to subjugate, control and absorb the Kazakhs. Yet in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise and dissemination of ethnonationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment among Russian political elites and intellectuals, attempts to civilize the Kazakhs through Islam was abruptly put to an end and colonial authorities shifted their attention to Christianization of the nomads of the steppe. At the core of Russia's civilizing mission in the steppe and in other colonial possessions lied cultural transformation of non-Russian alien populations from the state of backwardness and savagery to enlightenment and civilization. Under the influence of Christian theology and the Enlightenment ideas, Russian political elites and intellectuals came to see Christianity as the key source of cultural transformation of non-Russian populations of the empire. In this regard, Christianization of aliens meant their civility, which in turn meant their cultural assimilation and becoming Russian [Vulpus 2020: 313]. Russia under tsars conquered and colonized the Kazakh steppe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the conquest and colonization were not sufficient for full subjugation and control of the Kazakhs. Abdulina indicates that the rationale behind Christianization of the Kazakh Muslims was to change their mentality and turn them into docile and loyal subjects of the Russian empire [Abdulina, 2021: 68]. To retain the Kazakh steppe under imperial rule and incorporate it into the empire, Russian authorities placed a greater emphasis on cultural assimilation of the Kazakhs. Both colonization and control of the conquered populations were justified by a European Enlightenment concept of a "civilizing mission" [Campbell, 2015; Dzalaeva, 2019; Hofmeister, 2016: 411; Kobakhidze, 2016; 2017; Tolz, 2011: 27; Vulpus, 2020: 215]. As efforts to baptize the Kazakhs constituted the cornerstone of tsarist Russia's assimilationist policy towards the steppe, this study seeks to look at this issue from the perspective of historical and sociocultural anthropology.

**Materials and methods.** The study draws upon the relevant literature on this pertinent issue. An in-depth analysis of the current literature is provided in the discussion section. Specifically, the study draws on research studies of foreign scholars such as A. Afanasyeva, D.R. Brower, I.E. Campbell, I.W. Campbell, R.D. Crews, D.A. DeWeese, A.W. Fisher, A. Frank, R.P. Geraci, M. Khodarkovsky, U. Hofmeister, F.T. McCarthy, Y. Malikov, A. Morrison, N. Pianciola, V. Tolz, T. Uyama, R. Vulpus, P.W. Werth and others. These studies provide a thorough analysis and assessment of tsarist Russia's religious policy towards the steppe. The study utilizes a comparative approach, the method of cause and effect, an analysis of primary sources, and a critical discourse analysis. Using a comparative approach the study has juxtaposed different periods of Russian policy towards the steppe under the reign of Catherine II and then in the second of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, after the conquest of the Kazakh steppe and Turkestan in the 1860s, the Russian empire adopted and applied two contrasting approaches toward these areas. While Russia did not intervene in internal affairs and religious freedom of the indigenous peoples of Turkestan having kept making use of Catherine's policy of religious toleration, Russian colonial authorities terminated this policy in the steppe and increasingly focused on reducing the influence of Islam and baptizing the Kazakhs. The method of cause and effect is used to explore the long-term consequences and results of Russia's policy of proselytizing the Kazakhs and its eventual fiasco. An in-depth analysis of primary sources is crucial in getting insights into the top-down decision-making and policy implementation. A critical discourse analysis helps us critically approach and analyze the texts and dominant imperial discourses and narratives about the concept of "civilizing mission", imperial policy, evolution of tsarist Russia's policy towards the steppe, Islam, the Tatars, nomadism and Christianization of the Kazakhs.

The study theoretically builds on the theory of the civilizing mission, which is the main ideological basis for Russian colonial expansion and the dissemination of Russian civilization and Christianity among the Kazakhs in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Abdulina points out that the principles of historicism and the cultural-civilizational approach reveal the historical roots of tsarist Russia's Christianization policy vis-à-vis diverse conquered peoples of the Russian empire [Abdulina, 2021: 68]. The spread of Christianity and efforts to baptize the Kazakhs constituted the backbone of tsarist Russia's civilizing mission in the Kazakh steppe. The bottom line of imperial Russia's Christianization of the Kazakhs was that conversion to Orthodoxy was supposed to lead to the destruction of centuries-old nomadic Kazakh traditions, Muslim identity and way of life that served a powerful barrier to Russia's civilizing mission and the advancement of Orthodoxy into the steppe (Sadvokasova, 2020: 406). Specifically, Islam became a very serious obstacle to missionary efforts of Russian clergy to convert the Kazakh to Christianity (Sadvokasova, 2021: 91). According to the concept of the civilizing mission, European colonial empires had a moral duty and historical task to elevate non-European peoples from their state of savagery to the level of civilization through imposing their culture, languages, Christianity, schooling, political and economic

system. This belief stemmed from Eurocentrism and a European sense of cultural and political superiority over non-European peoples. From this Eurocentric viewpoint, traditions, customs, cultures, languages, religious faiths and way of life of non-European peoples were considered deficient and incompatible with the notions of progress and civilization. For instance, leading Russian officials, intellectuals and clergy were united in their view of Islam as inconsistent with civilization, progress, enlightenment and education [Sadvokasova, 2021: 87]. Tsarist Russia's Christianization policy in the Kazakh steppe in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries was motivated by the concept of the civilizing mission.

**Discussion.** The issues pertaining to Russia's civilizing mission in the Kazakh steppe and its attempts to proselytize the Kazakhs have received greater attention in contemporary studies. Literature draws attention to the construction of the hegemonic imperial knowledge about the religious affiliation and identity of the Kazakhs by Russian officials, ethnographers, clergy and some Kazakh informants [Werth, 2013: 129]. The dominant discourse that was produced and perpetuated by Russians was that the Kazakhs were not genuine Muslims, their Islamization was rather nominal [Afanasyeva, 2013: 144; Pianciola, 2009: 239; Werth, 2013: 129]. On those grounds, it was argued that as opposed to other Muslim ethnic groups such the Tatars, the Kazakhs were more receptive to Russian influence, and it was feasible to convert them to Christianity. Therefore, in the second half of the 19th century Russian colonial authorities terminated the official policy of religious toleration and Islamization of the Kazakhs initiated and implemented by Catherine II and her successors. Afanasyeva, Frank and DeWeese draw attention to the discourse of shallowness of Muslim identity of the Kazakhs was embedded in not only the tsarist era historiography, but also it was adopted and reproduced in Soviet and Western scholarship for many decades [Afanasyeva, 2013: 144; DeWeese, 1994; Frank, 2003: 261-262].

Russian construction of knowledge about the Kazakhs dates back to the pre-1731 period when Russian rulers and frontier administrators referred to them as "unbridled, unreliable, untrustworthy and unstable steppe beasts" [Khodarkovsky, 2004: 152-156; Vulpius, 2020: 40]. This knowledge production about the Kazakhs and other colonized peoples is conceptualized differently in studies. For instance, Yaroshevski refers to it as identity-building [Yaroshevski, 1997: 75], Khodarkovsky as the state construction of identity [Khodarkovsky, 1997: 21], and Pianciola as constructing colonial categories [Pianciola, 2009: 238]. Pianciola draws attention to the construction and application of colonial categories in tsarist Russia such as "inorodtsy" (aliens) to its colonies [Pianciola, 2009: 238]. The Kazakhs were among colonized peoples by Russia who stood apart from the colonizers due to their distinct ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious identity and nomadic way of life. In this case, Eschment argues that the Kazakhs as an Oriental nomadic non-Christian ethnic group were the antipodes of the Slavic, sedentary and Orthodox Russians [Eschment, 2004: 148]. In her view, the Russian perceptions and views of the Kazakhs were shaped by three distinct differences, notably by the diversity of beliefs, the affiliation to various regions of the world, and the divergence in the way of life [Eschment, 2004: 147-148]. In this regard, the Kazakhs were portrayed as a culturally and civilizationally "alien" and "other" people.

Khodarkovsky indicates key four dimensions of identity that separated the Kazakhs and other colonized peoples from Russians, namely political, ethnolinguistic, economic and religious [Khodarkovsky, 1997: 9-10]. In this case, Khodarkovsky singles out the religious dimension as the most important tool of the empire as conversion of non-Russians to Orthodoxy would bring them into the Russian states and ensure their cultural assimilation [Khodarkovsky, 1997: 17]. As Orthodoxy was the most important dimension of Russian national identity [Katkov, 2009: 412], anyone who did not adhere to the Russian Orthodoxy was seen as an "alien" and "other" [Vulpius, 2017: 117]. From this perspective, belonging to the Russian state and the Russian people was predicated upon one's adherence to Orthodoxy [Vulpius, 2017: 117]. In this sense, religion was the key identity marker in Russia. The "alien" and "other" status of non-Russians would come to an end once they converted to Orthodoxy [Geraci, 1997: 139; Khodarkovsky, 1997: 10] and they would be regarded as Russians [Vulpius, 2017: 117]. As Christianity was closely associated with civilization, Russian political elites and officials in frontier areas were convinced of the civilizing power of Christianity and believed as soon as non-Russians convert to Orthodoxy, they would voluntarily become Russian [Dzalaeva, 2019: 39].

Although Islam was considered a source of "otherness" and "alienness" [Geraci, 1997: 139], under the reign of Catherine II Russia invested in Islamizing the Kazakhs. Despite the fact that Catherine II dreamed of Christianizing the Kazakhs, she knew that the time was not ripe for sending Russian missionaries to the steppe. The crux of the problem was that Russia was unable to subdue the Kazakhs even if Russians had long seen them as their subjects. To pacify and bring the Kazakhs under control of Russia, Catherine II

instrumentalized Islam. Catherine II and her officials in the Orenburg frontier areas attributed the failure of Russia to subdue the Kazakhs and their recalcitrance to submit to the rule of Russia to nomadism [Fisher, 1968: 548]. In this case, Catherine II and Count Igelstrom, the governor of Orenburg, stressed the values of Islam, Islamic institutions and clergy for transforming nomads from an unruly belligerent group into peaceful docile settled peasants [Fisher, 1968: 548]. However, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Catherine II's policy of Islamization of the Kazakhs came under assault from Russian officials and intellectuals. The growing disenchantment with Catherine's legacy of religious toleration coincided with the rise of Russian imperial nationalism, the calls for cultural, ethnic and religious homogenization of multicultural populations of the empire, a joint attack of the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church against colonized peoples [Malikov, 2013: 181].

Tolz claims that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the concept of "civilizing mission" had become the ideology of Russian imperialism [Tolz, 2011: 27]. Russian rulers and officials in frontier areas considered Russian military conquest and colonization of the steppe and broader Central Asia as part and parcel of the European civilizing mission and extending Europe's borders deep into Asia [Morrison, 2015]. For Russian political elites and officials "civilizing mission" implied total cultural transformation of the Kazakhs, which involved their conversion to Orthodoxy, shift to sedentarism and cultural assimilation [Malikov, 2013: 182-183]. Russia's civilizing mission in the steppe envisioned the erasure of Kazakh nomadic culture and its full replacement by Russian culture [Malikov, 2013: 183]. In this case, Russians dreamed of not only transforming the steppe into a Russian guberniia, but also, turning the Kazakhs into Russians through their de-nomadization and sedentarization, their conversion to Orthodoxy and Russification. Yet Russians encountered formidable foes in the steppe. Islam and the Tatars were constructed as mortal enemies of Russia and a serious impediment to its civilizing mission [Fisher, 1968: 551]. In this regard, Russians came to argue that to be able to Russify the Kazakhs, they would first have to de-Islamize and de-Tatarize them. Despite drastic administrative measures taken against Islam and the Tatars and enormous investment in proselytizing the Kazakhs, the Russian government and clergy eventually failed to convert them to Orthodoxy [Geraci, 2001: 291]. The failures of Russia in converting the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy are attributed to a variety of reasons in literature. Yet the most conclusive argument seems to be that the views held by Russians about the religious affiliation and identity of the Kazakhs turned out to be false and misleading [Uyama, 2007: 39]. Russians failed to distinguish between religious doctrines and ethno-religious identity and were unable to admit the fact that the Kazakhs had long possessed a strong Muslim identity [Afanasyeva, 2013: 145; Frank, 2003: 261]. Highlighting the futility and ineffectiveness of Russian missionary activities in the Kazakh steppe, especially in southern Kazakhstan, Abdulina notes that the failure of Russian missionaries testifies to the strong adherence of the Kazakhs to Islam, which consolidated them against the encroachment of the empire on their national and religious liberties and rights (Abdulina, 2021: 76). As a result, Russian missionaries managed to convert about 1000 individuals to Christianity in Semirechie at the beginning of the 20th century, yet virtually all of these converts were refugees from China, but not Kazakhs [Abdulina, 2021: 75]. Up to 1917, the total number of Kazakhs who had converted to Christianity did not exceed 2659 individuals [Abdulina, 2021: 75].

**Results.** After the conquest of the Kazakh steppe in the 1860s, Russian colonial authorities focused on undoing Catherine II's legacy of Islamization of the nomads. The intent behind the attempts to put an end to Catherine's policy was that a new Russian imperial elite and officials in frontier areas came to see it as detrimental to Russian interests. They believed that the top-down imperial policy of Islamization of the nomads through the Tatar mullahs backfired and brought nearly irreparable and irredeemable harm to Russia. The state-orchestrated policy of disseminating Islam in the steppe created an unbridgeable gap between the empire and the Kazakhs, who distanced themselves from the "benevolent" influence of Russia. Russian political elite, officials and clergy argued that Islam and the Tatars were to blame for this disastrous situation. For instance, Grigoriev, the head of the Orenburg Border Commission in 1854-1859 and a prominent Russian orientalist, portrayed Islam as a threat to Russia and its civilizing mission in the steppe [Sartori, Shabley, 2024: 5]. Grigoriev's antagonism to Islam and Tatars lied in the belief that their unchecked influence had led to the alienation of the Kazakhs from Russia and failures in Russia's policy in the steppe [Sartori, Shabley, 2024: 5]. Therefore, Russian colonial authorities took drastic political measures and mobilized the resources of the empire to displace Islam and the Tatars. At the same time, by reducing the influence of Islam and the Tatars, imperial elites sought to remove all obstacles between the empire and the Kazakhs. In turn, this would pave the way for the spread of Russian culture, education and Christianity among the Kazakhs without much difficulty and efforts. As a result, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

Russian colonial administration attempted to displace Islam and the Tatars from the steppe and spread the gospel among the Kazakhs with the intention to convert them to Christianity.

As political discourse in favor of Islam had shifted against it, Russian officials and intellectuals emphasized the necessity to divorce the Kazakhs from Islam and the Tatar cultural influence. During the 1860s the establishment of Russian colonial governance in the steppe and application of its laws made the role that Islam, the Tatars and the OMSA (the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly) had long played in the name of Russia irrelevant and unnecessary. From now on, Russia persistently sought to remove them and introduce its direct colonial rule over the steppe. Moreover, Russians placed cultural and religious homogenization of multiethnic and multi-confessional populations of the empire at the center of their new nationalistic policy. In McCarthy's view, the driving force behind the renewal of missionary activity in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy [McCarthy, 1973: 314]. The Russian church was closely associated with Russian nationalism. Russian tsars since the time of Nicholas I had deeply been committed to the cause of Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy. Despite under the reign of Catherine II the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church had been reduced and missionary activity of Russian clergy had been diminished and even proscribed, the primacy of Orthodoxy and the need to propagate Christianity among Muslims and others were emphasized under the rule of Nicholas I. Sergei Uvarov, the Minister of Education, designed the imperial and nationalist ideology of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality" under the reign of Nicholas I, in which he stressed the historical and strategic significance of Orthodoxy in empire building and bringing culturally and religiously heterogeneous populations closer to the Russian people. Specifically, Uvarov highlighted the enlightening power of Orthodoxy [Uyama, 2007: 24]. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian officials in cahoots with Russian clergy prioritized proselytizing the Kazakhs, but not the settled and semi-nomadic populations of Turkestan. As Russian officials firmly believed that the indigenous inhabitants of Turkestan were more fanatical Muslims, they devised the policy of benign non-intervention for this region and abstained from proselytizing locals [Hofmeister, 2016: 424].

While Orthodoxy was perhaps seen as the most important marker of Russianness, Islam came to be portrayed not only as an embodiment of backwardness, ignorance, primitiveness and savagery, but also, as an indication of hostility to the Russian Empire [Hofmeister, 2016: 423-424]. For that reason, there were heated debates among Russian officials and intellectuals about the urgency of conducting missionary activity in the Kazakh steppe. In the 1860s and onwards a discourse of Kazakhs as "bad Muslims" became deeply established and informed policies of Russian officials and clergy in the steppe. In 1863, having argued that since the Kazakhs were ignorant of Islam and displayed their interest in Christianity, Stefan Pshenishnikov proposed initiating Orthodox missionary activity among the Kazakhs [Uyama, 2007: 26]. The need to proselytize the Kazakhs and other non-Russian populations was highlighted by high-ranking Russian statesmen such as Dmitry Tolstoy, the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod who drew attention to the benefits of proselytizing efforts to the Russian state as converted subjects would always be loyal to the empire [Hofmeister, 2016: 424].

Having portrayed the Kazakhs, the Tatars and other non-Russian populations of the empire as "wild and ignorant", Dmitry Tolstoy argued that they ought to be enlightened through the gospel, European civilization and science [Tolstoy, 1876: 4-5]. He justified his call for Orthodox mission in the steppe based on the belief that all subjects of the empire ought to practice the same religion as the Russian tsar [Uyama, 2007: 26]. Although Russian colonial authorities exercised caution with the possible proselytizing efforts in the steppe, the Steppe Commission that functioned in 1865-1868 highlighted the feasibility of initiating missionary activity among the Kazakhs. Having been assigned with the task to design the right model of colonial governance for the steppe, the Steppe Commission was also responsible for devising a strategy for preventing Islam and the Tatar cultural influence from further growth. The Steppe Commission reiterated and reinforced a dominant discourse of the shallowness of Muslim identity of the Kazakhs and their strong adherence to pre-Islamic beliefs such as shamanism [Uyama, 2007: 26]. Having concluded that Islam had been brought to the Kazakhs by Russia and Tatar mullahs, the Steppe Commission suggested canceling Russia's patronage of Islam and curtailing the influence of Islam and the Tatars.

Before 1867, Russian influence in the steppe had been negligible, Russian laws and institutions had not taken root in the region. The steppe had been under the jurisdiction of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (OMSA) or the Orenburg Muftiate since 1788 [Shabley, 2020: 305]. Russian officials now saw this body as unnecessary and detrimental to Russian interests. Hence, they decided to remove the steppe from the oversight of the OMSA. Thus, anti-Islam and anti-Tatar sentiment and calls for Christianizing the Kazakhs were crystallized into a concrete blueprint for political action and implementation, which was

reflected in the reports of the Kazakh Steppe Commission in the 1860s. Displacing Islam and Tatar missionaries and Christianization of the Kazakhs were emphasized as one of the key objectives of the steppe policy. Although the discourse of the Kazakhs as “bad Muslims” had taken deep root among Russians, the investigation undertaken by the Steppe Commission showed that Islam had firmly embedded itself in Kazakh culture and society [Uyama, 2007: 27]. In this regard, the Steppe Commission seems to have placed the blame upon Catherine’s policy of religious toleration and patronage of Islam, vigorously advocating the erosion of the influence of Islam in the steppe [Uyama, 2007: 27]. In this sense, the Commission extensively referred to prominent Russian and indigenous experts and scholars such as Levshin, Valikhanov and others, who had ardently advocated the removal of Islam and Tatars from the steppe as they were deemed to be a key impediment to the spread of Russian influence [Uyama, 2007: 27]. With reference to Orthodox proselytization, although it was highlighted that it was premature and risky to spread the gospel in the steppe, the Steppe Commission determined that the time was ripe for initiating missionary activities among the Kazakhs [Uyama, 2007: 27]. Thus, the Steppe Commission was not only tasked with paving the way for spreading Christianity among the Kazakhs, but also it was supposed to design the pertinent strategy for integrating the steppe into the empire.

The issue of what kind of policy approach to the governance of the steppe and Turkestan ought to be applied lied at the center of political debates among Russian high-ranking officials and policymakers. In this matter, there were two key opposing rival camps within Russian political elites. On the one hand, hard-liners or hawks, such as Nikolai Kryzhanovsky, the Governor-General of the Orenburg, vigorously demanded applying a harsher, more severe and uncompromising approach to the indigenous populations of Central Asia, advocating the total eradication of Islam and the Tatar influence and a large-scale Christianization policy. On the other hand, pragmatics, moderates or proponents of Catherine’s legacy of religious tolerance, such as Konstantin Kaufman, governor-general of Turkestan, drew attention to the prematurity and danger of efforts to proselytize the indigenous Muslim populations, calling for the continuation of Catherine’s policy in its modified form, which was reflected in the new formulation of Catherine’s legacy as “toleration but not protection” [Brower, 1997: 120]. With respect to Turkestan’s settled and semi-nomadic Muslim populations the Russian authorities decided to apply Catherine’s modified policy of religious toleration advocated and put into motion by Kaufman and his superiors in Saint-Petersburg such as Dimitry Miliutin, the minister of war.

It should be noted that both Kaufman and Miliutin and other moderates in fact entirely shared Islamophobic and anti-Tatar views of Russian hawks and hard-liners and searched for ways to eradicate these threats. The discourse of the “Islamic and Tatar threat” guided policy action of Russian colonial officials and Kaufman who argued that peace between Islam and any foreign power was unthinkable [Brower, 1997: 119]. Like Nikolai Kryzhanovsky, Kaufman dreamed of getting rid of Islam. However, Kaufman had two options, either achieving his goal through brutal persecution of Islam or through complete disregard of it (*ignoririovanie*). Considering his previous experience in the North Caucasus, specifically ruinous wars with Muslims, Kaufman opted for the second option, arguing that brutal crackdown on local Muslims would stir up their rebellion, which would ultimately be disastrous for Russia in its quest for integrating them into the imperial body. Another reason for the reemergence of Catherine’s policy in these frontier areas of newly conquered Turkestan was rooted in the belief that local Muslim populations of Turkestan were too fanatical [Hofmeister, 2016: 424]. The narrative of Muslim fanaticism in Turkestan prevented Kaufman from allowing the establishment of Orthodox missions in the region on the grounds that proselytism would induce ire and violent resistance of local Muslims that Russia may not be able to handle at all [Hofmeister, 2016: 424]. Believing in the superiority of Russian civilization and Christianity, Kaufman hoped that the introduction of Russian colonial administration, culture and education would lead to the disruption of Islamic institutions and extinction of Islam [Hofmeister, 2016: 425]. In Kaufman’s view, convinced of the superiority of Russian culture, indigenous populations of Turkestan would soon abandon their religious identity, voluntarily embrace the Russian way of life and would ultimately merge with the Russian people [Hofmeister, 2016: 425].

Uyama argues that Kaufman’s attitude to the steppe and its nomadic inhabitants seems to have drastically diverged from his policy towards Turkestan. Considering the Kazakhs to be less “fanatic” in comparison with the sedentary Muslims of Turkestan, he favored efforts to proselytize the former [Uyama, 2007: 31]. On that ground, Kaufman believed that it was feasible to Christianize the Kazakhs. Thus, when it came to the Kazakhs, Kaufman appears to have disregarded Catherine’s policy of religious tolerance [Brower, 1997: 122]. Subscribed to the discourse of the Kazakhs as “bad Muslims”, he argued that although

the nomads adhered to Islam, they shunned it and, in fact, they did not have any specific religious faith [Brower, 1997: 122]. In this case, while Kaufman partially extended the conventional policy of religious tolerance to Turkestan, he advocated the nullification of Catherine's policy of Islamization of the Kazakhs. From this perspective, Catherine's policy of religious toleration was solely reserved for settled and semi-nomadic Muslims of Turkestan. At the same time, with the introduction of the Provisional Statute for the Administration of the Steppe in 1868, the tsarist regime terminated Catherine's policy vis-a-vis the Kazakhs. It should be noted that Kaufman applied religious toleration policy to not all provinces of Turkestan. He seems to have acquiesced in Gerasim Kolpakovsky's policy of Christianization of the nomadic population in Semirechie [Uyama, 2007: 31]. Gerasim Kolpakovsky, the governor of Semirechie, and later the first governor-general of the Steppe, placed a greater emphasis on proselytization of the Kazakhs.

Kaufman may have seemed to be a moderate and accommodating as opposed to more belligerent hawkish prominent colonial administrators such as Nikolai Kryzhanovsky. In fact, he pursued the same policy of displacing Islam and the Tatar cultural influence. Furthermore, he pursued Russification of the indigenous peoples of Central Asia. Kaufman and Kryzhanovsky diverged in their approaches to achieving the common goal of integrating the region and its inhabitants into the empire. As opposed to Kaufman, Nikolai Kryzhanovsky held explicitly an anti-Muslim and anti-Tatar attitude, which he endeavored to translate into practice by eradicating the "Islamic and Tatar threat" and spreading the Gospel among the Kazakhs. As a militant Russian nationalist, Kryzhanovsky was increasingly irked by the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious heterogeneity of the empire, seeing this diversity as the main source of evil and trouble [Dyakin, 1998: 809]. Portraying Islam and the Tatars as sworn enemies of Russia, Kryzhanovsky waged a crusade and cultural war against them. To undermine and erode the Muslim-Tatar influence in the steppe, Kryzhanovsky called for tightening the grip on the activity of the OMSA and other Muslim institutions, lessening the number of mosques and Muslim clergy, introducing Russian education in Tatar schools, and restricting pilgrimage to Mecca [Dyakin, 1998: 810].

In his report of January 1867 to the Minister of Internal Affairs Pyotr Valuyev, Kryzhanovsky drew attention to the Muslim and Tatar threat across the empire, and to a lack of religious fanaticism among the Kazakhs and their receptiveness to the Russian cultural influence [Materialy po istorii SSSR, 1936: 202]. Calling attention to the need for shielding the Kazakhs from religious fanaticism, Kryzhanovsky proposed dramatic changes in the empire's religious and education policy towards the steppe. Specifically, he suggested introducing schools for Kazakh and Russian children where instructions would be conducted by Russian priests, all subjects be offered in Russian and students would have to study only Tatar literacy, reducing Islamic education and instead Orthodox dogmas be taught, outlawing pedagogical activity of Tatar mullahs, banning the residence of Tatar and Central Asian Muslim missionaries in the steppe [Dyakin, 1998: 813; Lysenko et al., 2014: 222; Materialy po istorii SSSR, 1936: 203-205].

The Russian crusade against Islam and the Tatar cultural influence in the steppe took the center stage in the imperial government's policy from the 1860s up to the fall of the tsarist regime in 1917. In accordance with the 1868 "Provisional Statute for the Administration of Uralsk, Turgai, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk Oblasts", the steppe and the Kazakhs were removed from the jurisdiction of the OMSA, the influence of Islamic institutions and clergy was significantly reduced, only one mullah be assigned to a volost, mullahs ought to be ethnic Kazakhs with the knowledge of Russian language, and mullahs be appointed and dismissed by the oblast governors [Zakonodatel'nye akty Rossiiskoi imperii, 2015: 143-144]. Thus, with the enactment of the Provisional Statute in 1868, Catherine's legacy of patronage of Islam came to an end in the Kazakh steppe. Moreover, through implementing anti-Muslim and anti-Tatar policies, Russian colonial authorities established a direct colonial rule over the steppe based on cultural superiority and paternalistic relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. This paternalism was the continuation of the conventional Russian sense of cultural superiority and an obligation of a "civilizing mission", which manifested in Russia's efforts to civilize the Kazakhs and safeguarding them from the "pernicious influence" of Islam, the Tatars and Muslim clergy of Turkestan. Yet it should be emphasized that Russia's "benevolent" and "humanitarian" efforts were aimed at wresting the Kazakhs from the influence of Islam and then subjecting them to Christianization and Russification.

Having established direct colonial rule over the steppe, Russian officials portrayed themselves as the protectors and guardians of the Kazakhs and their culture from the adverse impact of Islam, Tatars and Muslim clergy. In this regard, Russian attitudes towards the Kazakhs could be categorized as condescending and paternalistic [Remnev, 2006: 26]. Remnev points to Russian ambiguity and hypocrisy vis-a-vis the Kazakhs. On the one hand, they made efforts to rescue the Kazakhs from the "disastrous influence" of Islam

and Tatars. Yet on the other hand, their ultimate intention was to fully assimilate the Kazakhs through conversion and Russification [Remnev, 2006: 26]. However, the institution of Russian colonial governance did not immediately generate the expected and desired outcomes. Islam continued to play a prominent role in the lives of the Kazakhs and the Tatar influence had not been reduced. For that reason, confronting Islam and the Tatars remained one of the pressing issues in the agenda of Russian colonial authorities up to the demise of the tsarist empire in 1917.

Russian officials attributed Russian progress and success in civilizing the Kazakhs to the level of their Islamization and Tatarization [Materialy po istorii SSSR, 1936: 337]. In this case, Russian officials underlined the receptiveness of the Kazakhs to Russian culture and enlightenment. However, they also admitted the barriers created by Catherine's policy of Islamization and Tatarization in the steppe, which eventually held back and undermined the efforts of colonial authorities to Russify the Kazakhs [Carrère d'Encausse, 2007: 102-103]. One of the key measures for reducing the influence of Islam and the Tatars upon Kazakhs was to introduce and spread Russian education among the Kazakhs. Dmitry Tolstoy, the minister of education, and prominent Russian missionaries such as Nikolai Ilminsky advocated the introduction of the Cyrillic script into the Kazakh language and spread of faith-based Russian education in the steppe to put an end to the dominance of Islam and the Tatar cultural influence [Materialy po istorii SSSR, 1936: 338-339].

Like his many other contemporaries, Nikolai Ilminsky harbored deep Islamophobic and anti-Tatar sentiments, promoting a conspiracy theory that the Tatars were inherently enemies of Russia and were making efforts to instrumentalize Islam and Muslim institutions, including the OMSA, to unite all Muslims of Russia to dismantle the Russian empire [Crews, 2009: 226-227]. Ilminsky attributed the failures of Russia to integrate, assimilate and baptize the Tatars not to their natural right and obligation to resist Russian colonization, but to the purported hostility of Islam to education, progress, civilization and its tendency to shield the Tatars and other Muslims from Russia's "benevolent influence" [Geraci, 1997: 153]. In this regard, it can be argued that Ilminsky and other Russians who held Islamophobic attitudes ascribed anti-Russian behavior of non-Russians, their anticolonial resistance and attempts to maintain their distinct cultural identities to Islam. In this sense, Ilminsky argued that the removal of Islam would lead to the elimination of all existing barriers between Russians and non-Russians and would in turn result in absorbing non-Russians into Russian society through conversion and education.

Nikolai Ilminsky became perhaps the most influential faith-based educator of non-Russian peoples of the empire [Werth, 2001: 163]. While many Russian officials and clergy sought cultural assimilation of alien populations without a clear and efficient approach, Ilminsky developed a pedagogical strategy to lure non-Russians into Orthodoxy and ultimately Russify them. Unlike his contemporaries, he advocated the use of languages of non-Russians peoples to teach them the precepts of Christianity and bring them to the faith of Christ. This new pedagogical approach became known as the "Ilminsky system", which was designed to instrumentalize languages of non-Russian peoples for his missionary work [Geraci, 2001: 277]. He attempted to convert non-Russians to Christianity through their languages. The essence of the "Ilminsky system" lied in the introduction of an Orthodox school curriculum to schools with non-Russian children where instructions would be given in their mother tongues, textbooks and Orthodox scriptures would be translated into non-Russian languages, in which the Cyrillic script would be used not Arabic or any other alphabets [Geraci, 2001: 277]. Moreover, future pedagogues would be educated in such schools, who would later spread Russian education and Christianity among their kins. Ilminsky applied his method extensively and invested significantly in disseminating his large network of schools in the Volga region and beyond [Geraci, 2001: 278]. He considered the use of languages of non-Russian peoples as a temporary and transitional period from their Muslimness or other ethno-religious identity to Christianity and full Russification [McCarthy, 1973: 317]. Furthermore, he was certain that once aliens converted to Christianity, they would immediately be Russified, leaving behind their mother tongues, culture and ethnic roots [McCarthy, 1973: 317].

Ilminsky and his students focused on disseminating the "Ilminsky system" and his network of schools in the steppe, Turkestan and in other areas of the empire. They also engaged in missionary activities in the Kazakh steppe from the 1880s till the demise of the tsarist regime in 1917. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, driven by aggressive Russian nationalism, Russian authorities advocated and implemented belligerent nationalizing policies, putting tremendous pressure upon Muslims and other non-Russians to assimilate [Geraci, 2001: 281]. The huge pressure mounting upon the Kazakhs was reflected in the state-inspired mass migration of Russian and other Slavic peasants to the Kazakh steppe and a growing zeal of missionary activities of Russian clergy among the Kazakhs. While the state-orchestrated mass settlement of

Russian settlers in the steppe was intended to disrupt, shatter and ultimately dismantle the nomadic way of life of the Kazakhs, Orthodox missionaries were designed to induce mass conversion of the Kazakhs to Christianity and their full assimilation into Russian culture. One prominent Russian theologian noted in 1893 that mass conversion of non-Russians to Orthodoxy would lead them to fuse organically with the Russian nation [Geraci, 2001: 282].

The institution of the Kazakh (Kirghiz) Spiritual Mission by the Holy Synod in 1881 coincided with the rise of aggressive Russian nationalism and assimilationist policies across the empire. The key task of the Spiritual Mission was to spread the gospel in the steppe and convert the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy. Nikolay Ilminsky and his followers significantly contributed to the institutionalization of Orthodox mission in the steppe [Campbell, 2017: 70]. The head of the Kazakh Spiritual Mission Vladimir Senkovsky in 1882-1891 determined the task of the mission as raising the banner of Christ in the steppe and make the Kazakhs genuine Christians [Belyaev, 1900: 294]. Indicating the uselessness of the Kazakh way of life that had been made worthless due to the deep social transformation induced by the implementation of the 1868 Provisional Statute, Vladimir Senkovsky envisioned inevitable assimilation of the Kazakhs and their eventual merging with the Russian people [Belyaev, 1900: 292]. The Kazakh Spiritual Mission was significantly backed by Russian colonial authorities, specifically by Gerasim Kolpakovsky, the former governor of Semirechie and now the first governor-general of the Steppe, who ardently advocated missionary activities of Russian clergy and Christianization of the Kazakhs [Uyama, 2007: 31]. Kolpakovsky increasingly targeted impoverished Kazakhs, who in his view, were more susceptible to conversion. In this regard, he invested in building communities of destitute Kazakhs in the form of villages, who would one day become rich and successful and would in turn attract their Muslim kins to Christianity [Uyama, 2007: 32]. Kolpakovsky believed that mass conversion of the Kazakhs and other Oriental peoples to Orthodoxy would lead to their spiritual affinity with the Russian people [Uyama, 2007: 32].

However, the top-down state-inspired concerted efforts of Russian authorities and Russian missionaries to convert the Kazakhs to Orthodoxy ultimately produced infinitesimal results. Discussing the problem of the fiasco of Russian missionaries in the steppe and its underlying causes is out of the scope of this study. Yet drawing on the relevant literature, it can be argued that all dominant Russian discourses of the religious identity of the Kazakhs turned out to be erroneous and false. Uyama draws attention to the primary wrong perceptions of Russians about the Kazakhs [Uyama, 2007: 39]. The discourse of the Kazakhs as “bad Muslims” and the conviction that it would be much easier to convert them to Orthodoxy proved to be erroneous [Uyama, 2007: 39]. Russians’ views of non-Russian peoples’ religious faith and identity were primarily shaped by religion. This was because in the state of Muscovy and later in imperial Russia religion was the main identity maker, and hence, Russians’ worldviews and perceptions of others were shaped by religion. Coupled with the religiously driven civilizing mission, a religious-based understanding of the world prevented Russians from forming a correct view of others. One of the clear indications of such erroneous views of the Kazakhs was the failure of Russians to differentiate between religious doctrines and identity [Uyama, 2007: 39]. Although it could be true that the Kazakhs were not as devout Muslims as those sedentary peoples of Turkestan or Tatars, Islam was an integral part of their national identity. It was also a spurious view that the Kazakhs had embraced Islam due to Catherine’s patronage of Islam and Islamization of the nomads of the steppe. In this case, Frank calls attention to the infelicity of the term “Islamization” of the Kazakhs as they had long been Muslims before the Russian conquest, who overwhelmingly regarded Islam as their ancestral religious faith adopted in the distant past [Frank, 2003: 261]. In Frank’s view, Catherine’s policy of Islamization of the steppe nomads was in fact one of the important periods of the development of Kazakh Muslim identity [Frank, 2003: 262]. For that reason, the Kazakhs came to see the efforts of Russian colonial authorities to curtail and terminate Islam and Islamic institutions as a clear indication of a concerted and intentional assault upon their ethnic, cultural and religious identity. As a result, the Kazakhs increasingly perceived Christianity as a religion of their oppressors and Russian missionaries as agents of Russian colonialism and imperialism [Lysenko, 2008: 154]. In this case, Islam was seen as a powerful shield against Russian colonialism. To sum up, although Russia was ultimately able to integrate the steppe and its inhabitants into its imperial body, all efforts to Christianize and Russify the Kazakhs proved fruitless.

**Conclusion.** The study has explored tsarist Russia’s civilizing mission in the steppe and its policy of Christianizing the Kazakhs in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The results of the study have shown that despite the political, cultural and military prevalence of Russia in its quest to spread civilization and Christianity in the steppe, the accomplishment of cultural and religious

transformation of the Kazakhs remained out of question. From the last quarter of the 18th century and up to the demise of the tsarist regime, imperial Russia's religious policy underwent drastic profound changes and transformations from "Islamization" of the Kazakhs initiated and implemented by Catherine II and to "Christianization" efforts by Russian Orthodox clergy in cahoots with the Russian government. Both "Islamization" and "Christianization" policies were conceptually, ideologically and theoretically underpinned by the Enlightenment ideas of a "civilizing mission" and a cultural superiority of European Christian nations over the peoples of the Orient. Although Christianization of non-Russians preceded the Russian empire going back to the era of Muscovy, with the adoption of the European Enlightenment ideas Russia assumed the worldwide role of spreading Christianity and European civilization to its colonies in Asia. From now on, Christianity and civilization were considered as identical and fundamentally the same. From this standpoint, along with other European colonial powers, Russia increasingly invested in disseminating Christianity and European civilization among its subject populations across the empire. Yet under the rule of Catherine II and her successors there had been a drastic paradigm shift in Russia's civilizing mission in its eastern and southern frontiers. Despite the deep-rooted prevalent anti-Islam sentiments in Russian society, Catherine II leveraged Islam and recruited the Tatars as a civilizing force to pacify and subdue the Kazakhs. The negative discourse on Islam changed dramatically. Russian political elites and officials depicted Islam as a benevolent tool from which the empire would benefit significantly.

However, by the mid-19th century due to the rise of imperial nationalism and the failures to subdue the Kazakhs through Islam and the Tatar mullahs, Russian political elites and officials had drastically shifted their view of Islam and the Tatars, seeing them as enemies of Russia and its civilizing mission in its colonies. The rise and dissemination of anti-Muslim and anti-Tatar sentiments among Russians gradually led to the end of Catherine II's policy of religious toleration and patronage of Islam in the Kazakh steppe in the 1860s-1870s. Having outrightly rejected any idea of the utility of Islam and the Tatars, Russians officials stressed the need to remove them from the steppe and embark upon the path of baptizing and Russifying the Kazakhs through the top-down administrative measures and missionary activities. Russian officials, orientalist and clergy constructed the hostile image of Islam and the Tatars, portraying them as vicious and vile foes of Russia and a serious hurdle to its civilizing mission in the steppe. Administrative reforms in the 1860s led to the removal of the Kazakhs from the jurisdiction of the OMSA and prohibition of the activities of Tatar and Central Asian Muslim missionaries in the steppe. Through the weakening of the influence of Islamic institutions and clergy as well as reducing the role of Islam and the Tatars, Russian colonial authorities sought to establish Russia's political, cultural and religious domination in the steppe and beyond. For that purpose, Russian colonial authorities established the Kazakh Spiritual Mission and allowed Russian missionaries to spread the gospel among the Kazakhs with the intent to bring them to Orthodoxy. Yet ultimately the policy of religious conversion of the Kazakhs ended in failure. Studies attribute the failures of Russian Christian missionary activities in the steppe to a variety of factors, which ought to be explored in detail in future research.

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