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## A Biography in Motion: Chokan Valikhanov and His Travels in Central Eurasia

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**Scott C. Matsushita BAILEY**

**A BIOGRAPHY IN MOTION:  
CHOKAN VALIKHANOV AND HIS TRAVELS  
IN CENTRAL EURASIA\***

Writing a biographical essay on the life of a historical figure is often problematic.<sup>1</sup> There are layers of complex interpretation to deal with, particularly as the distance from the subject increases and as historical interpretation evolves. Political transformations that take place within the space that is the focus of the study further complicate matters as time progresses. Historians often write biographies, as much as they try to avoid it, with subconscious attention to issues relevant to their own time, something that contemporary scholars must keep in mind when reading previous works. Individuals who were living under times of transition or colonial encounter present particularly interesting subjects for the historian, although they also

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<sup>1</sup> The *Ab Imperio* editorial team has pointed to Marc Bloch's ideas from his classic *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Metier d'historien* for further inspiration on the study of the hu(man) as history. Marc Bloch. *The Historian's Craft*. New York, 1953. P. 27.

arrive embedded in additional layers of complexity, particularly when the individual exhibits ties both to the colonizer and the colonized and when the setting for the person's life is a place amid geographical and political flux. Historians who write biographies, therefore, do so amid a minefield of potential problems.

Approaching a biographical understanding of Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov (1835–1865), born Mukhammed Khanafiia, is no less difficult. Valikhanov was one of many individuals involved in the process of Russian colonization and scientific and ethnographic study of the Central Eurasian region during the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Although most of those involved in the natural scientific and ethnographic research of the region were of Russian or European ancestry, many were not, including Valikhanov. On the one hand, his biography is not atypical of the many scholar-travelers that were supported by the Russian Geographical Society in research expeditions to Central Eurasia during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> He was educated in a “Russian” or even Western way, had contacts with prominent individuals in the intellectual elite, and presented the results of his research expeditions in a fashion similar to that expected of individuals associated closely either with the state, the military, or scientific societies

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<sup>2</sup> There is no shortage of studies devoted to Valikhanov or to various biographical accounts of him. This note will list some monographs and articles that discuss him as a historical personage. For Valikhanov's collected works, see Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*. Almaty, 1961. For a more condensed version of his selected writings, see Valikhanov. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*. Moscow, 1986. For an overview of opinions of Valikhanov by his contemporaries, see A. Akhmetova. *Chokan Valikhanov: v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov*. Alma-Ata, 1964. For a succinct biographical overview of Valikhanov and his close associate Grigorii Potanin, see Iu. N. Bessonov and V. Ia. Yakubovich. *Po vnutrennei Azii* (Ch. Ch. Valikhanov i G. N. Potanin). Moscow, 1947; Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov // *Central Asian Review*. 1966. Vol. 14. Pp. 25-31; Igor Mikhailovich Zabelin. *Chokan Valikhanov*. Moscow, 1956. For a recent English-language overview of his biography, see Kermit E. McKenzie. *Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar* // *Central Asian Survey*. 1989. Vol. 8. No. 3. Pp. 1-30. For Russian Geographical Society historian Lev Semenovich Berg's summary of Valikhanov's life and accomplishments, see L. S. Berg. *Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let*. Moscow, 1956-1962. Pp. 110-112.

<sup>3</sup> For a lengthy discussion of several individual scholar-travelers who were supported through the Russian Geographical Society's projects in Central Eurasia, see Scott C. Matsushita Bailey. *Travel, Science, and Empire: The Russian Geographical Society's Expeditions to Central Eurasia, 1845-1905* / Ph.D. dissertation; University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2008. This work also includes information on the contributions and careers of Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, Nikolai Przheval'skii, Grigorii Potanin, and Aleksandra Potanina.

like the Russian Geographical Society.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Valikhanov left evidence of a perspective that diverged from that of most of these individuals. He displayed a degree of sensitivity to the lives of Central Eurasian peoples throughout his career and ultimately made the decision, when he was very ill, to leave the world of establishment Russian scholars and studies, as the sources indicate a withdrawal from the career trajectory he was on and, instead, embraced a life of a more “traditional” Central Eurasian or Kazakh person, albeit one from the relatively privileged position of a Chinggisid Kazakh. In approaching a study of his biography, it is hard to overstate the complexity of “understanding” Chokan Valikhanov and it seems appropriate to portray him as an individual who was an amalgamation of multiple political dimensions: including that of the colonizing Russians who wished in part to advance Russian “civilization” in Kazakh territories; that of the colonized Central Eurasians whom Valikhanov hoped would advance in some way from their involvement with Russia; and that of the Chinggisid nobility, who operated in a kind of intermediate position of power between the two other groups. He could be seen by some as a colonial worker, but also as an individual who took advantage of the opportunities to be had by pursuing the path of a “Russian” scholar-traveler, which was made possible for him in part by virtue of his birthright. A question emerges of agency, and of who was in control of whom in this situation.

Valikhanov’s biography should be read as that of someone who had a great understanding of the colonial system and of the way that many Russian scholars of the time, or many European scholars of the nineteenth century, advanced their careers. He did not accept what scholars in the Geographical Society or related organizations involved in exploration were doing wholesale, but this does not mean that he did not see value in the process

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<sup>4</sup> In Russian, it is the *Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo*, or in abbreviated form, the RGO. The organization went through a number of name changes over its history, but for the sake of brevity and uniformity, I will use RGO to refer to the organization from here on. The RGO was founded in 1845, and its founding followed the creation of similar national geographic societies in France in 1821, Prussia in 1828, and Great Britain in 1830, and preceded the American Geographical Society’s founding in 1852. Tatiana Nikolaevna Oglezneva. *Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo: izucheniye narodov severo-vostoka Azii 1845-1917 gg.* Novosibirsk, 1994. P. 3. Other geographical societies and their founding dates include Florence (1824), Dresden (1831), Bombay (1836), Frankfurt (1837), Boston (1840), and Rio de Janeiro (1839). N. Knight. *Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855* // Jane Burbank, David L. Ransel (Eds.). *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1998. Pp. 133-34.

of ethnographic and geographic study of the Central Eurasian region and its peoples. As Harry Liebersohn has recently argued about the study of travel and empire in a number of global contexts, “to imagine just two opposed categories, natives and non-natives, would be to simplify the nature of cultural encounters in general... in fact people on both sides moved beyond this polarity to take advantage of a multiplicity of roles between native and European societies.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Liebersohn found that the collaborations that often occurred between European travelers and locals were a way of advancing the careers and satisfying the intellectual curiosity of “indigenous peoples,” as well as the colonizer.<sup>6</sup> These are the issues that make a closer inspection of Valikhanov’s biography and travels so interesting.

My central argument is that Valikhanov’s biography can and should be reinterpreted to emphasize his geographic mobility and the fluidity of his identity. He was not strictly a colonial agent, nor was he a strict patron of Kazakh or Middle Horde nationalism, even though there are elements of his biography that historians could glean to present that point of view, and many have certainly done so in the past. I would position him away from the polarities of nationalist, imperialist, or nobility, and instead argue that Valikhanov moved back and forth on a wide spectrum between these polarities. He carried out activities in a way that advanced his career and personal interests, including travel, ethnography, and scholarship. Valikhanov was a person often on the move, who navigated through and adapted to multiple cultural worlds in a time of tremendous change.

### *Chinggisid Genealogy and Origins*

Chokan Valikhanov was raised on the steppe, from a family that lived among the Middle Horde Kazakhs, the Orta juz. The Orta juz were one of the three major unions of tribes of Kazakhs, a group that lived in a vast area extending across the central and northern parts of today’s Kazakhstan.<sup>7</sup> His family had a distinguished genealogical record, as his paternal grandfather Vali was a Kazakh khan who could trace his family line back to the sixteenth century khan Kuchum. Vali’s own grandfather, and Chokan Valikhanov’s

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Liebersohn. *The Travelers’ World: From Europe to the Pacific*. Cambridge, 2006. P. 139.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* P. 141.

<sup>7</sup> The other two unions of tribes included the Greater or Elder Horde, or the Uli juz, which lived in the southeastern part of Kazakhstan, and the Lesser or Younger Horde, which lived in what is now western Kazakhstan, known as the Kishi juz.

great-great-grandfather was Ablai Khan, a heroic *batyr* who won fame for his success in playing off both Qing Chinese and Russian colonial interests in the region through some shrewd diplomacy.<sup>8</sup>

Chokan's ancestors were Kazakh Chinggisids, who gained the right to territory in the region in part through their hereditary lineage. Following the promulgation of a new Russian imperial administrative structure for the region in 1822, the power of Kazakh khans was more subjected to Russian concerns.<sup>9</sup> The Vali Khans, or Valikhanovs as they became known to the Russians, were able to assert authority over the space by virtue of their claim to be "white bone" or Chinggisid Kazakhs, rather than "black bone" or non-Chinggisid Kazakhs.<sup>10</sup> The distinction between white-bone and black-bone Kazakhs led to many struggles for political control continuing throughout the Russian Empire's administrative advances on Middle Horde Kazakh territory. The system of political power and rightful claims to land in the Kazakh Chinggisid system was extremely complicated, a subject now under the consideration of Virginia Martin.<sup>11</sup> The Valikhanov family's claim to Chinggisid lineage put them in the privileged position of nobility, which would have separated them from the experiences of the Kazakh nomad and warrior commoners in that they had a right to contend for the position of khan. However, Martin cites the work of Kazakhstani historian and expert on the Kazakh Chinggisids Irina Erofeeva, who has argued that white-bone Kazakhs did not always win political authority and the position of khan automatically by virtue of their bloodlines. Positions of authority were often contested by others, even by black-bone Kazakhs.<sup>12</sup> Although

<sup>8</sup> *Batyr* was the title for a traditional Kazakh warrior or hero.

<sup>9</sup> The 1822 Rules on Middle Horde Kazakhs, or *Ustav o Sibirskikh Kirgizakh*, established state administration for the first time officially in Middle Horde territory, and led the Chinggisid Kazakhs to first have to deal with this outside authority. Cited in Martin. *Kazakh Chinggisids under Russian Rule, 1820s-1830s*. Pp. 1-4.

<sup>10</sup> "White bone" in Kazakh is *aq suiek*. "Black bone" in Kazakh is *qara suiek*.

<sup>11</sup> I would again like to thank Virginia Martin for allowing me to see and reference some of her as yet unpublished work on the Chinggisid Kazakhs in the early nineteenth century. Virginia Martin. *Kazakh Chinggisids under Russian Rule, 1820s-30s* / Unpublished paper for the conference "Family and State in Chinggisid and Post-Chinggisid Eurasia" in Bloomington, Indiana, September 5-7, 2008; Martin. *Kazakh Chinggisids, Land, and Political Power in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: A Case Study of Syrymbet* / Unpublished paper presented at the Winter 2007 Symposium of the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, December 5-7, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Martin. *Kazakh Chinggisids, Land, and Political Power in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: A Case Study of Syrymbet*. P. 4; Irina Erofeeva. *Rodoslovnye kazakhskikh khanov i kozha XVIII-XIX vv.* Almaty, 2003. P. 12.

the power and authority of the Kazakh Chinggisids was being checked by Russian authorities by the time of Valikhanov's young adulthood, Chokan's Chinggisid heritage made a significant imprint on his identity, and further complicates his sense of "Kazakhness," as this put him at an elevated level of status that separated him from more "mainstream" nomadic Kazakhs. Throughout his life, Valikhanov's interactions with and among Russians, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Central Eurasian peoples was impacted by his Chinggisid heritage. It placed him in a unique position, as relatively few Kazakhs carried this lineage and there were inherit privileges and distinctions that were made for him by virtue of that fact. It also paved the way for his advancement in Russian cultural society.

Emperor Alexander I had granted an estate for Vali, Chokan's grandmother Aiganym, and the Valikhanov family in Syrymbet, which was thought to be the first European-style home to be built for and inhabited by Kazakh people. Chokan's father, Chingis, also served in the Russian imperial administration, under the Western Siberian governorship. The Western Siberian governorship allotted positions to Kazakhs in the administration on the basis of their Chinggisid heritage, with the hope that in so doing the Russians could exert some indirect influence on the populace in the long term, by appealing to and upholding their Chinggisid traditions.<sup>13</sup> Chingis was one of the first Kazakhs to learn the Russian language and married at the age of 23 in 1834 to Zeinep Chormanova, who became the mother of seven sons and five daughters. Chokan was born to Chingis and Zeinep in November 1835 in Kushmurun. His family spent time both at the family home in Syrymbet and at Kushmurun. The Valikhanovs were also well-connected to the Russian administration, and officers who came through the area often made stops at the Valikhanov home, which provided Chokan and his siblings excellent educational opportunities that were unparalleled for most Middle Horde Kazakhs.

### *The Cultivation of a Young Scholar-Traveler*

Chokan's grandmother Aiganym was clearly an important influence in the young man's upbringing. She was also particularly close with Russians throughout her life, and was seen as a great admirer of Russian culture. Aiganym pushed her young grandson to be educated in a Western/Russian fashion, but she also encouraged him to be grounded in a more traditional upbringing by providing him with a steady dose of Kazakh history and cul-

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<sup>13</sup> Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 10-22.

ture. She had frequent correspondence with the Asian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Siberian Committee in St. Petersburg, and had hopes that Chokan would follow the same path to success with the imperial administration that her son had.<sup>14</sup> Her influence steered Valikhanov toward a lifelong interest in Kazakh and Kyrgyz folklore, which he would develop more fully following his expeditions in his writing of many historical and cultural essays on these peoples. Among his later scholarly achievements was his collection and translation into Russian of the Kyrgyz epic story “Manas.”<sup>15</sup> Chokan first attended a Kazakh village school, where he was encouraged to “zhety zhurttyñ tilin bilu.”<sup>16</sup> He studied Chaghatai Turkic, Arabic, and Persian languages there. Young Chokan also developed an interest in drawing, a hobby that he advanced in part through his acquaintances with the many Russian scientists, scholars, and military types who paid frequent visits to the Valikhanov home during their trips to the steppe. He studied Kazakh poetry, developed a hobby in falconry, assisted in the herding of animals, drank *kumys* (fermented mare’s milk), often lived in a yurt, and practiced Islam. Chokan also spent a great deal of time traveling on long excursions across the steppe.<sup>17</sup>

The Valikhanov family’s connections helped earn Chokan admission to the prestigious Siberian Cadet Corps Institute in Omsk in 1847, an institution that steered Valikhanov in a decidedly different educational direction. The Cadet Corps was considered the best institution in the region at the time and the coursework there included subjects as diverse as military discipline, world geography, Russian geography, world history, Russian history, Russian and West European literature, philosophy, botany, zoology, physics, mathematics, geodesy, architecture, natural history, drawing, calligraphy, Russian, French, German, Turkic, Mongol, Arabic, and Persian.<sup>18</sup> Chokan quickly emerged as a top student and the fact that he was Kazakh made his achievements, in the eyes of his teachers and fellow students, particularly admirable. Chokan completed his studies at Omsk in 1853, but because of his *inorodets* (native) status, he was not allowed to carry out the final year’s coursework, which was mainly in military science subjects that were

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Valikhanov first transcribed the notes for the recording of this epic in 1856 during his journey to Issyk Kul.

<sup>16</sup> In the Kazakh language, this literally meant “learn the languages of seven peoples.” Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. P. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 30.



off limits for those with *inorodets* status.<sup>19</sup> So, while he had tremendous opportunities in his education at Omsk, not all doors were opened to him. Although he was from white-bone lineage, and was “privileged” in many ways, this status did not allow for his unlimited advancement.

During his years in Omsk, it became clear to some of his classmates, such as Grigorii Potanin, that Valikhanov had aspirations to become a scholar-traveler, and had a fairly clear idea of how he could go about achieving that goal.<sup>20</sup> Young Valikhanov had told Potanin that they must both go to St. Petersburg to acquire the appropriate education. Potanin mentioned later in his remembrances that he talked often of travels to distant lands, including those discussed in the writings of Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>21</sup> Potanin found that Valikhanov, “constantly carried this dream in his head. And [this dream] came to light involuntarily in his casual utterings and gestures.”<sup>22</sup> Valikhanov and Potanin both went on to fulfill their dreams and become accomplished scholar-travelers. Valikhanov and Potanin remained friends, and many years later Potanin paid last respects to Valikhanov’s elderly father Chingis.<sup>23</sup>

After his time at the Cadet Corps, Valikhanov secured employment working for the staff of the Governor-General of Western Siberia in Omsk, General Gustav Khristianovich Gasfort. Although his main job involved work in Omsk, Valikhanov was also sent out on short expeditions. He first accompanied the Russian military officer K. K. Gutkovskiy to Kopal and in 1855 traveled under Governor-General Gasfort to Semirech’e and Tarbagatai.

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<sup>19</sup> *Inorodets* was a status bestowed on the Kazakhs through Mikhail Speransky’s Statute of 1822. One of the main provisions of the statute exempted Kazakhs and other groups in Siberia and Central Eurasia from carrying out military service. Andreas Kappeler. *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*. Harlow, 2001. Pp. 169-71, 188, 264; Valikhanov. *Sochineniia* / Pod. red. N. I. Veselovskago // *Zapiski Imperatorskago russkago geograficheskago obshchestva po otdieleniiu etnografii*. Sankt-Peterburg, 1904. P. xix; McKenzie. *Chokan Valikhanov*. P. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Grigorii Potanin (1835-1920) would also become a very accomplished scholar-traveler in his own right. He carried out several expeditions to Central Asia, China, Eastern Turkestan, and Mongolia. He was accompanied on many of his travels by his wife Aleksandra Potanina (1843-1893), who compiled her own essays and reports on the regions that they traveled through. For more on them, see chapter six of Bailey. *Travel, Science, and Empire*.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander von Humboldt’s ideas, like those of Carl Ritter, had a profound impact on the understanding of geography as it developed in Russia at mid-century.

<sup>22</sup> *Literaturnoe nasledstvo Sibiri* / Pod red. N. N. Ianovskogo. 1983. Vol. 6. P. 93.

<sup>23</sup> This interesting account of Potanin visiting the *iurt* of Chingis Valikhanov appeared originally in Grigorii Potanin. *V iurte posledniago kirgizskago tsarevicha* // *Russkoe Bogatstvo*. 1896. Vol. 8. Pp. 60-88.

These expeditions allowed Valikhanov to visit areas that had only recently fallen under Russian control and allowed him to establish his footing as a capable researcher and traveler. These experiences also allowed him to have more involved assignments in the future, by paving the way for his acceptance into the Russian military and scientific establishment.<sup>24</sup>

### *Journey to Issyk Kul*

In 1856 Valikhanov participated in an expedition across Kazakh territory all the way south to Lake Issyk Kul in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. This expedition was planned and coordinated by Colonel M. M. Khomentovskii. This was a major military and scientific expedition with a two-pronged goal. The military goal of the expedition was to acquire an oath of loyalty from the Bugu clan of Kyrgyz, who lived in the area around the lake. The scientific goal of the mission was to collect topographical and strategic military information about the area. Although Valikhanov participated in fulfilling these official goals of the expedition, he also found time to make his own observations about the Kyrgyz tribes of the area, which could have been used to facilitate the process of improving Russian–Kyrgyz relations.<sup>25</sup>

A few important points regarding Valikhanov's observations during this May through July 1856 expedition reflect larger patterns in his career as a scholar-traveler. First, it is interesting to note that Valikhanov made a systematic and painstaking description of the landscape. This description was not unlike the style of the travel reports of Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, who was establishing a prominent position for himself in Russian elite scientific circles, and who would be in part responsible for advancing the career of Valikhanov.<sup>26</sup> A second point to note about this account is Valikhanov's inter-

<sup>24</sup> Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 367.

<sup>25</sup> Valikhanov's "Dnevnik poezdki na Issyk-kul" was published in Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 228-288.

<sup>26</sup> Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii (1827-1914), whose original family name was Semenov, was perhaps best known for his 1856-1857 expedition to the Tian Shan Mountains. He was given the last name upon the fiftieth anniversary of this seminal expedition. Among several biographies of Semenov-Tian-Shanskii is W. Bruce Lincoln. Petr Petrovich Semenov-Tian-Shanskii: The Life of a Russian Geographer. Newtonville, 1980. For his autobiography, see the first volume of Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii. *Memuary*. Petrograd, 1917-1946. His history of the first fifty years of the RGO is an important source for the history of the organization's formative years. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Andrei Andreevich Dostoevskii. *Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva*. Sankt-Peterburg, 1896. For an English translation of his account of the Tian Shan Mountains expedition, see Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii. *Travels in the Tian'-Shan': 1856-1857*. London, 1998.

est in documenting the cultural characteristics of the people of the region, whose cultures he found to be quite similar to the Kazakh society he had been raised in. The third point to note is that his style of description, as a kind of detached observer, is similar to the way Mary Louise Pratt has described the observational style of many imperial travelers to faraway lands.<sup>27</sup>

Much of Valikhanov's journal from the Issyk Kul journey is devoted to descriptions of the outlay of the land, which comes across as dry to most contemporary readers. He also includes many descriptions of the flora and fauna of the area, but does not go into a Linnaean cataloguing of the area, as many Russian and European scholar-travelers of the time would have. This is probably because his education at Omsk, while wide-ranging, did not emphasize natural science in the way that education at other institutions would have, for example, like Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's education at the University of Berlin prior to his 1856-1857 Tian Shan expedition. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii had been directly exposed to the scholarship of Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter while in Berlin, which had provided him with the necessary knowledge to make a Linnaean scientific classification of the environment. Although Valikhanov did not go into Linnaean description, his geographical descriptions were quite detailed and often included interjections of ethnographic descriptions. His ethnographic interjections in the text are brief, though, and it is clear that his account was written mostly for the use of the Russian empire and military, which comes through in the tone and substance of the report. Valikhanov mapped the territory, guided his Russian readers through it, and provided instruction along the way on how future travels, including the movement of military troops, could be most efficiently carried out through these little-known lands. Many times he discussed the potential for agriculture or settlement in particular zones, such as in the following passage, where he documented every twist and turn in the landscape for future settlement, development, and mapping:

The Alatau Mountains along the Chilika [river] and its tributaries are covered with fir forests in abundance. In the valley along the bank of the Chilika there are no special fodder grasses, except for yusan and wild poppies, but on the other side the bank of the river is rich with rose willows... and honeysuckles. These bushes appear on the side of the river like a thick green alleyway. In the middle of the stream surrounding the river's rose willows appears a tall forest, called... Bauagach. At the mouth of the Ili it is covered with cane and

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York, 1992.

saxaul... the angle formed by the [rivers]... as the natives say, has good places for hay.<sup>28</sup>

Valikhanov's descriptions of the Issyk Kul landscape, flora, and fauna seem to avoid going into lengthy ethnographic observations or descriptions, though they did emerge in short passages from time to time. He described brief conversations with the Kazakh and Kyrgyz whom he encountered on the journey, but these conversations are discussed from the vantage point of a colonial official more than that of a fellow Central Eurasian. His early diary of the Issyk Kul journey can be compared to those of Pratt's "imperial eyes" travelers in that many of Valikhanov's observations reflect those of a detached observer. Pratt's description of the "anti-conquest," or the process whereby both casual and scientific European travelers to extra-European or colonized lands extracted elements of the environment or information that was most useful for their readers, is a useful point of reference for analyzing the Issyk Kul diary.<sup>29</sup> However, we have to be careful not to place Valikhanov's Issyk Kul account firmly within that of an all-knowing, "monarch-of-all-I-survey" Prattian observer. This is because Valikhanov also exhibits a sensitivity to and interest in the local culture, landmarks, and people he encounters, beyond just listing them as curiosities or points for future conquest. The peoples whom he describes in this account are not mere background pieces, but he also does not view them as equals. In part, this is because of his white-bone ancestry, which endowed him with a higher status, both from his own point of view and from that of the individuals he encountered. So, the evidence from his early travelogues is that Chokan Valikhanov was involved in imperial projects of documentation and scientific description, but was also more perceptive about the cultures of the peoples of the territory than many Russian or European scholar-travelers had been.

### *First Visit to Kulja/Qing China*

Upon completion of his Issyk Kul journey, Valikhanov gained credibility and was called on for a more challenging mission of reconnaissance into Qing Chinese territory. The destination of this 1856 journey was the city of Kulja in Eastern Turkestan, or today's city of Yining in Xinjiang, China.<sup>30</sup> The Russians and the Qing Chinese had signed a joint treaty in 1851, which

<sup>28</sup> Valikhanov. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*. P. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Pratt. *Imperial Eyes*.

<sup>30</sup> Valikhanov's travelogue for the Kulja mission was published in Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 11-104.

paved the way for a Russian trade presence in Kulja. Valikhanov's goal was to investigate the economic situation there, while making his first journey into Qing territory. He stayed in Kulja for three months and collected information on the city, the locals, and the economic situation. Perhaps most important for his career, the Kulja expedition paved the way for Valikhanov's more dangerous journey to Kashgar in 1857-1858.

On the path to Kulja, Valikhanov romanticized the Alatau Mountains as a boundless space, which he compared to his native steppe, in which "one's wishes and affairs are carefree."<sup>31</sup> As he had also done in his Issyk Kul travelogue, Valikhanov discussed the difficulties he faced in passing through the terrain and how these were overcome, again paving the way for future Russian military advancement. Again he described the flora and fauna and the geographical outlay, and extracted points of information that would be useful for future travelers, troops, or settlers. Valikhanov expanded his attention to cultural matters in this travel account, perhaps because his sense of cultural difference was more enhanced than on his Issyk Kul journey.

His journey was supported this time by Qing Chinese officers, who were even able to provide him with some information about the local territory and peoples.<sup>32</sup> Valikhanov and his travel companions were provided with opportunities to rest at the many checkpoints or pickets along the path to Kulja. He described how well they were treated there, as they were often offered tea and refreshments and enjoyed pleasant sleep, "like a sultan on a soft divan with his harem."<sup>33</sup> But as things progressed, the Qing administration became more suspicious of Valikhanov's visit and began to keep close tabs on his crew's location and activities. This included several times in which Valikhanov and company were questioned at length by Qing officers about their reasons for being there.

Valikhanov displayed an elevated attention to ethnographic or cultural observations on the Kulja journey. He observed, for example, that the Muslims of western China engaged in "fanaticism," which he found typical of "Muslims of the East," and drew clear distinctions between the practices of Muslims in settled valley areas like those in Eastern Turkestan and the practices of those such as the Kazakh and Kyrgyz.<sup>34</sup> This sense of difference between Muslim practices was one that Valikhanov identified again later, and seemed to be an important point of interest either for him or for the

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<sup>31</sup> Valikhanov. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*. P. 50.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* P. 59.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* P. 60.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* P. 62.

audiences he hoped to entertain and inform with these reports. Valikhanov often demonstrated an aversion to what he saw as a more fanatical brand of Islam and worried about its possible impact on Kazakhs. He also strove, in the Kulja diary, to communicate to his Russian and European colleagues that it was tremendously difficult to “understand” “Chinese” culture and ways. Valikhanov emphasized the complexity of Chinese language and how difficult it was to study.<sup>35</sup> This speaks to another element of his career role, that of a cultural intercessor of sorts, a role in which he seemed to thrive.

Valikhanov also, intentionally or not, exoticized the region and its peoples through his pencil sketches. He made sketches throughout his life, a skill he had cultivated since childhood. His pencil sketches from the Kulja journey included an especially exoticized image of a room of people smoking opium, which evoked a sense of mystery and fantasy. Many of the people are seated on the floor, several have pipes, and everyone is dressed in traditional robes. All of the men have queues. In the background, a man and a woman walk out of the room arm in arm.<sup>36</sup> Evidence such as this sketch indicate that Valikhanov was interested in the “space” for more than the extraction of information for imperial interests. He was also becoming interested in the uniqueness of the place and of the people there, as images like the one described were hardly anything of value to future colonizers, settlers, travelers, or traders.

Upon his completion of the Kulja expedition, Valikhanov was invited to St. Petersburg in 1857 to present his travel findings to the Russian Geographical Society. The RGO’s members were greatly impressed with his findings and with his research acumen and recommended that Valikhanov make future expeditions to Central Eurasia. The leadership of the organization began to realize that his ethnic identity, appearance, and language skills made him an ideal candidate for expeditions to more dangerous and challenging destinations, especially ones that required linguistic skills or an outward physical appearance that few Russian or European individuals had.

### *Valikhanov in Disguise in Kashgar*

It was Petr Semenov-Tian’-Shanskii who first recommended, to General Gasfort, that Valikhanov would make a prime candidate to visit the troubled city of Kashgar in western China. Kashgar had been a critical Silk Road trade center for centuries, a common byway point, especially for Muslim

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. P. 72.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. P. 80.

and Central Asian traders. Valikhanov was sent to Kashgar to investigate the current volatile political climate and make observations about Kashgaris and their opinion of the current regime. There was a sense of growing discontent among many western Chinese Muslims that was soon to erupt into a string of rebellions across the region.<sup>37</sup> Given the rising tide of political opposition, the Russians saw the region around Kashgar as a potential site of contestation or even colonization, particularly given their recent successes in areas just to the west of the border between Russian and Qing areas of influence.

The Russian military and intellectual elites surmised that the peoples of what is now Xinjiang would likely be amenable to Russian influence given the Turkic populations of the area and their close linguistic and cultural ties to ethnic minorities like the Kazakhs. Indeed, the migration patterns of many Central Eurasian nomads, Kazakhs included, paid little attention or heed to the borders of the two empires, and many nomads crossed them frequently, then just as now.<sup>38</sup> His covert mission to Kashgar, it was hoped, would advance Russian assessments of the area through making as detailed an observation of the situation as possible. A most immediate reason for Valikhanov's journey to Kashgar was to investigate the disappearance and death in the area of the German explorer and traveler Adolph Schlagintweit. The Russians were also concerned about the possible need to head off potential British designs on the region.<sup>39</sup> Petr Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii later wrote in his history of the first fifty years of the Russian Geographical Society that Valikhanov was irreplaceable in this Kashgar mission, as he was "the only one" at the time who could go in disguise to collect information about the region "of the utmost value" for Russia and the Geographical Society.<sup>40</sup>

Valikhanov's journey to Kashgar was carried out following Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii's recommendation in late 1857 and was supported by the Geographical Society, the Ministry of War, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He first traveled southward to Vernyi (today's Almaty) to attempt

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<sup>37</sup> These are often referred to collectively as Hui rebellions, and can in part be seen as a wider process of rebellion ongoing since the Taiping Rebellion. David Atwill has recently conducted important studies of rebellion in western China. David Atwill. *Rebellion South of the Clouds: Ethnic Insurgency, Muslim Yunnanese, and the Panthay Rebellion* / Ph.D. dissertation; University of Hawaii at Manoa, 1999; Atwill. *The Chinese Sultanate: Islam, Ethnicity, and the Panthay Rebellion, 1856-1873*. Stanford, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> To read more on Kazakh migration patterns, see Linda Benson and Ingvar Svenberg. *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks*. Armonk, New York, and London, 1998. Pp. 50-55.

<sup>39</sup> Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov // *Central Asian Review*. 1966. Vol. 14. Pp. 28-29.

<sup>40</sup> Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Dostoevskii. *Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti*. P. 276.

to learn as much as he could from the local Kazakhs about the current situation in Kashgar, but was unable to pass through to Chinese territory due to heavy snows and had his mission delayed by several months. In June 1858, he finally joined a trade caravan of 42 people, 101 camels, and 65 horses in Semirech'e and disguised himself as a merchant, calling himself Alimbai. Along the way Valikhanov met with and joined up with other Central Eurasian merchants, but was often trying to tamp down suspicions that a Russian sympathizer was among the caravan's ranks. These rumors luckily never reached the critical point of an outright accusation of Valikhanov, in part because of his success in establishing strong friendships among his fellow travelers in the caravan and later among elites in Kashgar. He enjoyed some degree of success because of his ability to befriend male elders, especially *aksakals* or "white beards" and was clearly able to communicate on good terms with the locals, often invoking the name of Allah to help him gain passage through potentially hostile areas.<sup>41</sup> After crossing the treacherous mountain terrain, the caravan crossed the border into Qing territories in September and arrived in Kashgar in October 1858.<sup>42</sup>

Valikhanov spent most of his time in Kashgar in fear of being discovered by the locals. He learned that the area was under the political sway of the Kokand Khanate. He also observed that many of the traders and travelers there were part of a wide trade network, including merchants from Andijan and Bukhara, Tajiks, Persians, Afghans, Indians, and Armenians.<sup>43</sup> While in Kashgar one of the *aksakals* offered a bride for Chokan Valikhanov. She was a local noblewoman who proved to be a valuable source of information about the area. However, when Valikhanov left Kashgar at the end of winter he left without her. He only remarried at the end of his life – a Kazakh woman from the Greater Horde.<sup>44</sup>

While in Kashgar, Valikhanov saw a display of human skulls and wondered if one of those could have been Schlagintweit. He later confirmed with a local that one of the skulls was indeed that of the missing German traveler. In his travelogue and his report on the expedition, Valikhanov was again successful at providing a thorough description of the region and its peoples.<sup>45</sup> This account provides details of the distances traveled, the prob-

<sup>41</sup> See the following reference for a dialogue in which Valikhanov successfully "sweet talks" a local. Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 181-82.

<sup>42</sup> Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov // *Central Asian Review*. P. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. P. 68.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* P. 570.

<sup>45</sup> For this travelogue, see *ibid.* Pp. 176-264.



lems faced and overcome by the caravan and by Valikhanov individually, security checkpoints, important geographic features, and some suggestions for future travelers on how to bypass potential problems. On this journey he also made a number of sketches and maps of geographic locations and buildings, which demonstrate clear strategic significance to his Russian elite readership.<sup>46</sup> Again, though, it is important not to jump to the conclusion that Valikhanov was purely an agent of empire, even on such a potentially dangerous and strategically significant expedition, for among the sketches that he made were a number in which the subjects were Central Eurasian individuals, presumably people whom he encountered either in Kashgar or en route.<sup>47</sup> If he were strictly there for reconnaissance, why did he spend time making idle sketches of seemingly unimportant or common individuals? The answer could be, simply, that he was a human being with interests beyond exploration and pure scientific or strategic research, who enjoyed the diversion of these sketches and conversing with the many people he came across in his travels. Equal to the scholarly value of his drawings, Valikhanov's humanity also comes through in his sketches, and this is an important part of his biography. Although he was engaged in some important work and reportage, he also exhibited a humanity and interest in many people, and did not see them strictly as detached subjects.

By the spring of 1858 Valikhanov had returned to Russian territory in Vernyi and then later to Omsk to report fully on the mission to the Russian authorities. The expedition took a very hard toll on his health, and in the remaining years of his life he went through several bouts of severe illness. Despite this setback, Governor-General Gasfort was very satisfied with the results of the Valikhanov expedition and proposed that he travel to St. Petersburg, after a recovery period, to give a full report on the expedition. While in recovery in Omsk, Valikhanov wrote up the report of this mission and published his observations initially in the *Notes of the Geographical Society*. Valikhanov's work on Kashgar provided the Russian authorities with valuable information on trade routes and the political conditions of the area, as well as ethnographic information. Later scholars praised his work as the "best of all Muslim compositions, not infected by fanaticism."<sup>48</sup> The Kashgar mission was critical for the successful career of Valikhanov as a scholar-traveler. He was promoted to the rank of captain in the military, awarded a medal, and given a 500 ruble award. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, ever the

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<sup>46</sup> For a sketch of the area that Valikhanov made, see *ibid.* Pp. 228-229.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* P. 232.

<sup>48</sup> Berg. *Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let.* P. 111.

benefactor of Valikhanov, also recommended that he be given a position in the Asiatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg. This was a very intellectually challenging and rewarding position, in which he drew up maps, carried out more of his own work researching the history of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz people, attended Geographical Society meetings, made research presentations, and did a lot of academic work connected to St. Petersburg University. During this time Valikhanov also became more directly connected to the social circuit of St. Petersburg, which allowed him access to the cultural and intellectual elite of Russia.<sup>49</sup>

### *The Artistic Eye and the Power of Perceptions*

As was already mentioned earlier, since childhood, Valikhanov had made sketches. The many Russian officials, scholars, and scientists who passed through the area and often stayed at the Valikhanov home in Kushmurun shared their work and their skills in drawing with the Valikhanov children.<sup>50</sup> Chokan's brother Makazhan Valikhanov (1844-1923) received artistic training at St. Petersburg, and was the only aspiring professional artist among Chokan's siblings.<sup>51</sup> But Chokan continued to do sketches in adulthood and as part of his professional life. A big part of his research reports were roughly drawn maps or depictions of geographical territory. But beyond these sketches that reflected his participation in the process of gaining colonial control over territory, Valikhanov's sketches also offer a window onto his personal perceptions and interests. A great number of sketches were made of people in everyday life scenes.<sup>52</sup>

By looking at the sketches, one can gain a fuller insight into the life and concerns of the man. Many of the drawings are lifelike and realistic, revealing his sensitivity to the individuals he was drawing. The viewer gets the sense that he had some degree of connection with many of the subjects and was not simply a detached observer exploiting the space for the valuable information that could be provided to colonial authorities, as Pratt argues about imperial travelers in her work. Many of his drawings seem to have

<sup>49</sup> Chokan Chingisovich Valikhanov // *Central Asian Review*. P. 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* P. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 21-22.

<sup>52</sup> The archival collection of these drawings is in PFA RAN. F. 23. Op. 1. No. 13. This collection contains a wide range of Valikhanov's work, including maps, sketches of both Central Eurasian and Chinese people, sketches of stone inscriptions, and random notes. Unfortunately, many of them are unlabeled or lacking dates or descriptions of what they depict.

been done out of a personal interest in depicting particular scenes or individuals, perhaps out of interest in the places or peoples or in the picturesque quality of the scenes. Of course, some travel scholars have argued that by capturing the picturesque quality of landscapes the imperial observer was attempting to possess the landscape.<sup>53</sup> But this seems farfetched in many of these cases. This is not to say that many of his drawings, particularly maps and sketches of geographical features, were not done for the sake of colonial advancement.

### ***The Global Scholar-Traveler***

Although he is certainly a unique case in many ways, it is appropriate to place Valikhanov within the class of global scholar-travelers of the Russian Empire. That is, there were a growing number of individuals involved in the Geographical Society and in Central Eurasian exploration who were also well acquainted with international ideas on science and geography. The German geographer Carl Ritter's ideas were widely circulated among Russian scholars of the time.<sup>54</sup> Ritter's book on Asian geography was translated into Russian by many of the Geographical Society's scholars, a project in which both Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii and Valikhanov were involved. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii had begun translation of Ritter's work in 1851 and was especially interested in translating the parts that he felt pertained to Russian affairs, especially sections on Central Asia and territories adjacent to Russia in East Asia.<sup>55</sup> Ritter had argued for the importance of a multidisciplinary scientific study of the geography of Asia and saw great potential in comparative studies of geographic features. Ritter also placed great importance on ethnographic elements of geography, a key characteristic found in many of the RGO's research reports of the time, including Valikhanov's. Valikhanov's

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<sup>53</sup> Here are two of the growing number of scholarly sources that connect travel and visual elements to imperialism. David Arnold. *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science 1800-1856*. Delhi, 2005; Christopher Ely. *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia*. DeKalb, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> For more on Ritter's influence on Russian scholars of the time, see Natalia Georgievna Sukhova. *Karl Ritter i geograficheskaya nauka v Rossii*. Leningrad, 1990; Carl Ritter. *Zemlevedenie Azii. Geografiya stran, nakhodiashchikhsya v neposredstvennykh snosheniakh s Rossiou, t.e. Kitaiskoi imperii, nezavisimoi Tatarii, Persii i Sibiri*. Perevedena s dopolneniyami sluzhashchimi prodolzheniem Ritterova truda, na osnovanii materialov, obnarodovannykh s 1832 g. i sostavlennymi P. Semenovym. St. Petersburg, 1856-1874. In 9 volumes.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* Pp. 4-5.

involvement with this international body of scholarship further complicates his biography, as he identified on some levels with the cosmopolitan and global intellectual elite.

As part of Valikhanov's pursuit of the life of a Russian scholar-traveler, he translated a portion of Ritter's work, a report titled "On the Ancient Kirghiz or Kazakhs."<sup>56</sup> This work indicated Valikhanov's involvement in the process of global scholarly work, since engagement with the work of Ritter and Humboldt had been such an important prerequisite to the many who became involved in Russian scientific research and travel. Natalia Sukhova's study of the influence of Ritter's ideas on Russian scholars is a critical contribution to the globalizing paradigm of Russian geographical scholarship. But it is interesting that she omits Valikhanov's part in this process, perhaps because of his status as less than truly "Russian."<sup>57</sup>

In addition to his adventurous research trips, Valikhanov also penned many essays and reports on a wide range of scholarly topics throughout his adulthood. He had a true devotion to cosmopolitan academic scholarship, particularly when looking at the original manuscripts, which include many revisions and an interest in an extremely eclectic range of scholarship, folklore, and ethnographic information. His manuscripts, of course, indicate a Western-style education, but they also draw attention to his use of "Eastern" sources and knowledge in a way rarely found among scholars of the time. Many of his writings and reports indicate this ongoing tension between the colonial or Western project of which he was a part and a questioning of that project.

His report titled "About Muslims on the Steppe" also provides some interesting insights on Valikhanov's perspective.<sup>58</sup> He offers some of his views on the Islamic faith and its place within the Russian Empire and some predictions about the future development of Islam within Central Eurasia.<sup>59</sup> Valikhanov found that, for "his people" on the steppe, Islam was at a crossroads and at a very early stage in its development. He argued that

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<sup>56</sup> PFA RAN. F. 23. Op. 1. No. 15. The title of this document, which is 45 lists long, is "O drevnikh kirghizakh ili khakasakh iz Ritterovoi Azii."

<sup>57</sup> Sukhova. Karl Ritter i geograficheskaya nauka v Rossii.

<sup>58</sup> This report was utilized by the Steppe Commission of 1865-1868, as part of their task of assessing the degree to which Islam had taken root among Kazakhs. Tomohiko Uyama. *A Particularist Empire: The Russian Policies of Christianization and Military Conscriptation in Central Asia* // Idem. *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*. Sapporo, 2007. Pp. 27-28.

<sup>59</sup> This essay, which is titled "O musul'manstve v stepi," was published in Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 524-529.

for many Kazakhs Islam was only beginning to be known and practiced, and was still very slow to replace traditional beliefs (shamanism), comparing the status of Islam among Kazakhs to “Ancient Rus’ at the time of the Reverend Nestorius.”<sup>60</sup> At the same time, Valikhanov found that Islam was growing quickly among some Kazakhs and that many of their legal and cultural practices were reflected in this growing influence. Chokan was not very supportive of some of the new Islamic practices, making the rather crude observation that “some sultans and rich [Kazakhs] lock up their own wives in separate yurts, as in harems.”<sup>61</sup> He also argued that the growing influence of Islam could spell problems down the road for the Russian colonial administration, finding that Kazakhs were increasingly wary of “Russian enlightenment” and “Russian brotherhood.” In this essay he walked a tightrope between condemning radical forms of Islam and advocating a persecution or eradication of Muslim practices by Russian elites. Instead, Valikhanov walks a middle path in the essay, arguing that drastic measures would yield contrary results, but that the administrators in Orenburg should take measures to curtail the influence of mullahs and religious “charlatans” on the steppe, who posed a direct threat to the Russian imperial project and the cultivation of “Russian enlightenment,” “Russian brotherhood,” and the spread of Orthodoxy.

### ***Friendship with Dostoevsky and the Cultural Elite***

There were arguably few individuals who had as complex a life or historical biography as Fedor Dostoevsky, which perhaps was what drew him to the young Valikhanov, and Valikhanov to him. Dostoevsky had been exiled to Western Siberia just at the time that Valikhanov was there, and they developed an interesting friendship, much of which we know about on the basis of a letter that Dostoevsky penned to him in December 1856. The following lines provide us with insight into Valikhanov’s relationship with Dostoevsky, but they also reveal as much about Valikhanov’s career trajectory and the hopes of many in the cultural and intellectual elite that Valikhanov could be a star scholar and agent of cross-cultural “understanding” between the Russians and Central Eurasians.

Dostoevsky wrote:

Be the first of your people to interpret to Russia the steppe, its significance, and your people in their relation to Russia, and at the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. P. 524.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

same time serve your homeland as its enlightened intercessor before the Russians. Remember that you are the first Kazakh to be educated in the European way. Fate has made you moreover a superlative human being, has given you both a soul and a heart. . . . But among these dreams there was one reality: this is that you are the first of your people who has received a European education.<sup>62</sup>

Chokan Valikhanov and Dostoevsky engaged in long conversations about history, literature, and other topics during their friendship in Omsk, and after Valikhanov's death Dostoevsky kept a rosewood box he had received as a gift from his friend, in which he stored important keepsakes.<sup>63</sup> Valikhanov's connections with Dostoevsky and other elites were in part to be expected given his upbringing. His relationship with Dostoevsky came at a time in which Dostoevsky became a firm advocate of Russian military expansion and colonization, as well as disillusionment with Western, or European, ideas. It is logical that Dostoevsky and Valikhanov would befriend each other, as both of them were individuals torn between multiple philosophical and cultural worlds, yet both had found, during the 1850s, a connection to the activities of the Russian military and the ongoing process of empire-building. Although Valikhanov was not a Slavophile as Dostoevsky had become, he was an admirer of many things Russian, and that could also account for their connection.

### *The Twilight Years*

After the Kashgar trip, Valikhanov had frequent bouts of bad health. In 1861, he decided to leave St. Petersburg and return to the steppe, hoping that the cause of his illness was the damp climate of Petersburg. Valikhanov returned to his village/*aul* to recover and to spend time with his family members. On the basis of his Chinggisid heritage, he was able to run for election as senior sultan of the Atbasar district in 1862. Valikhanov blamed his loss in the election to political corruption and became disgusted. He briefly recovered his health, though, and he decided to return to Omsk to participate in a Russian commission to investigate legal reform in the region.<sup>64</sup> In one of

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<sup>62</sup> Archival location of the letter, dated December 14, 1856, is OR RNB. F. 262. No. 5. Also published in Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. Pp. 88-92. Translation of this excerpt appears in McKenzie. *Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar*. P. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Valikhanov. *Sobranie sochinenii*. P. 81.

<sup>64</sup> The question of legal reform for the Kazakhs and the transitions made to adat law is thoroughly addressed in Virginia Martin. *Law and Custom in the Steppe: The Kazakhs of the Middle Horde and Russian Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century*. Richmond and

the final acts of his career, Valikhanov was then invited by General Mikhail Cherniaev to participate in the military invasions of southern Kazakh territories in the spring of 1864.<sup>65</sup> It is at this point that Valikhanov's biography takes a decidedly different direction. Although he accompanied Cherniaev and company to the military operations at Auli-Ata (Dzhambul) in June 1864, he grew very disillusioned by the campaign and the treatment of the locals. Valikhanov then left Auli-Ata in July 1864 for Vernyi. Rather than go from there back to Omsk, Chokan moved to the village, or *aul*, of his Kazakh friend Tezek, who was a sultan and Chinggisid of the Alban clan, who were located in a settlement close by the Altyn-Emel' Mountains. Valikhanov settled down there, married Tezek's sister, and carried out his own research on the history and ethnography of the Greater Horde Kazakhs. It is significant to note here Valikhanov's reconnection with his Kazakh Chinggisid heritage. His marriage into this clan was only possible because of his own white-bone lineage. He continued to write to Russian scholars and officials in Omsk and St. Petersburg, but his health grew worse day by day.

Chokan Valikhanov died in Tezek's aul in April 1865 from complications of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine. In the preface to the first collection of his edited works, published four decades after his death, the editor Veselovskii compared Valikhanov's life to a "brilliant meteor flashing across the field of oriental studies."<sup>66</sup> In 1865, the RGO issued a lofty statement that Valikhanov's dangerous and important expedition to Kashgar "represented the most outstanding geographical achievement since the time of Marco Polo."<sup>67</sup> His countless essays on a wide range of topics did make a crucial contribution to the collective knowledge of Central Eurasia, both geographically and culturally. His expeditions uncovered information about territories and peoples that it would have been very difficult for Russian or European scholars to acquire. He was a prolific scholar who was interested in a wide range of topics, and was equally complex himself. Valikhanov's career problematizes assumptions made about the project of orientalism itself, which is part of what makes his biography so interesting to review in light of many recent studies that try to make overarching assumptions about the motivations or goals of oriental scholars.

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Surrey, 2001. For more on the impact of legal reform on Russian colonial administration in Muslim Central Eurasia, see Robert Crews. *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*. Cambridge, 2006.

<sup>65</sup> For more on Cherniaev, see David MacKenzie. *The Lion of Tashkent: The Career of M. G. Cherniaev*. Athens, 1974.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in McKenzie. *Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar*. P. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Valikhanov. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*. P. 8.

*A Hybridized Biography*

Anatolyi Remnev, in describing the Russian Empire's expansion to Siberia and the Far East, has referred to the structure of the empire in terms of what he calls a "geography of power." By invoking and building upon traditional theoretical constructs of empire from Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, Andreas Kappeler, and others, Remnev has suggested that the Russian Empire's presence in distant territories was often supported through a combination of regional and administrative policies that problematize traditional understandings of center or core and periphery. The border areas of the empire were especially in flux, but were being incorporated, albeit somewhat haphazardly, in part through the activities of Russian travelers and "scientific conquest," which also blurred the line between scientific research and military affairs.<sup>68</sup> Within this complex mixture of both core and periphery elements in Central Eurasia, Valikhanov thrived as someone who personified elements of both "extremes," yet one who occupied the wide "in-between" of this enormous spectrum of political activity, and someone who operated, or even flourished, in a hybridized space.

This article illustrates the difficulty of placing Chokan Valikhanov's biography firmly within that of a colonial or imperial collaborator, or of a promoter of some proto-Kazakhstani nationalism. Although he was involved in expeditions sponsored by both military and elite scientific bodies, Valikhanov's observational style was far from that of an imperial collaborator, though that aspect of his work was evident. He did provide geographic descriptions, ethnographic accounts, and maps of territories of great strategic and scientific importance to the empire, but at the same time exhibited a less than full-fledged support for some of the colonizer's activities. It seems more appropriate to emphasize that Valikhanov hoped that the introduction of Russian education, trade, systems of governance, and technologies to Central Eurasians could bring them great benefits, but at the same time he was not an active proponent of either Middle Horde or Kazakh resistance or future independence.

Valikhanov's involvement in scientific activities and military expeditions and his association with cultural and intellectual elites do not make it clear that he was doing this to advance imperial interests or purely the national interests of the Kazakhs. Rather, he seemed intent as much on advancing

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<sup>68</sup> Anatolyi Remnev. *Siberia and the Russian Far East in the Imperial Geography of Power* // Jane Burbank, Mark Von Hagen, Anatolyi Remnev (Eds.). *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007. Pp. 425-38.



his own career aspirations as a scholar and traveler as much as those of the Russians or the Kazakhs. Valikhanov was in the position to do so given his Chinggisid heritage and the Russian administration's preference for preserving the elite status of individuals like him. By doing so, the imperial authorities hoped to extend power transfer from indirect to a more direct sense of control. Of course, the imperial administration was not a finely oiled machine, and the application of this general principle was often haphazard and not uniform. However, Valikhanov's participation in scientific research and travel activities could be considered a form of cooperation, in that both sides benefited from their mutual support and activities. The Russian colonizers' attempts to solidify their control over steppe Eurasian territories were advanced through Valikhanov's important contributions. He also benefited by ensuring for himself a career, albeit cut short, as an accomplished scholar who enjoyed unparalleled success among Central Eurasians in Russian imperial society.

There is perhaps no more profound moment in Valikhanov's biography that illustrates a decidedly nonconformist approach to a Russian colonial project than his decision to leave this sphere of work following his participation with General Cherniaev at Auli-Ata. His interest in Kazakh and Kyrgyz traditional culture and history had been evident in much of his earlier research work, but there was no moment prior to the summer of 1864 in which Valikhanov so clearly objected to his participation in a project he saw as having more drawbacks than benefits to Central Eurasians. He objected so strongly to it, that he was willing to forfeit his career path as Russian scholar-traveler, for which he had been groomed since childhood.

As with any historical personage, particularly one as active as Valikhanov, there are countless past and currently evolving schools of interpretation, which make the contemporary understanding of Valikhanov's biography that much more complex. Valikhanov's friend Grigorii Potanin, writing thirty years after Valikhanov's death, found that "in the heart of Valikhanov love for his own peoples combined with Russian patriotism... [characteristics that] rarely coexist[ed] in one person."<sup>69</sup> The earliest Russian historical interpretations, from the academic Veselovskii, put a claim on Valikhanov

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<sup>69</sup> Potanin. V iurte posledniago kirgizskago tsarevicha // Russkoe Bogatstvo. 1896. Vol. 8. P. 78; M. V. Shilovskii. Ch. Ch. Valikhanov i G. N. Potanin: transformatsiia lichnosti v paradigmakh frontira // Stepnoi krai Evrazii: istoriko-kulturnye vzaimodeistviia i sovremennost': tezisy dokladov i soobshchenii mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii / Pod red. R. M. Zhumashev, A. P. Tolochko. Omsk, 2005. P. 8. 188

as closely linked to Russian colonial scholarship.<sup>70</sup> During the 1950s, Soviet academic K. Beisembiev painted Valikhanov as a critical figure for Kazakh education or enlightenment, who was instrumental in bridging the gap between Russian and Kazakh peoples, while also seeing Valikhanov as an important Kazakh national figure.<sup>71</sup> The interpretation of Valikhanov as a Kazakh national figure, enlightener, or defender of oppressed peoples continued to develop later in the Soviet period.<sup>72</sup> As the modern nation-state of Kazakhstan has emerged, interpretations have, of course, shifted to reflect new political realities, including a new placement of Valikhanov in Kazakh protonationalism and his more direct connection to Central Eurasian cultures and folklore.<sup>73</sup> The most recent and interesting scholarly work has attempted to reconstruct him as a product less of any discrete “national” identity than of a complex regional “frontier” zone in Western Siberia and the steppe zones of Eurasia.<sup>74</sup> These latest interpretations provide a most nuanced interpretation of Valikhanov, but as this article has tried to argue, history as a “science of men” or of “men in time” is always an imperfect study, and Valikhanov’s biography is no exception to that general rule. As Bloch found, “historical time is a concrete and living reality with an irreversible onward rush.”<sup>75</sup> It is only through acceptance of that chaotic fluidity that one can approach the construction of Valikhanov’s biography, which was, is, and will be, in perpetual motion.

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<sup>70</sup> McKenzie. Chokan Valikhanov: Kazakh Princeling and Scholar. P. 1.

<sup>71</sup> K. Beisembiev. *Iz istorii obshchestvennoi mysli Kazakhstana vtoroi poloviny XIX veka*. Alma-ata, 1957.

<sup>72</sup> For a later Soviet period example of this interpretation, see Zhabaikhan Mubarakovich Abdil’din. *Chokan Valikhanov i sovremennost’: sbornik materialov Vsesoiuznoi nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 150-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Ch. Ch. Valikhanova*. Alma-ata, 1988.

<sup>73</sup> Samat Oteniaz. *Shoqan osken orta*. Almaty, 1995; V. M. Ploskikh (Ed.). *San-Tash – 140: materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi pervoi zapisi eposa Manasa Ch. Valikhanovym*. Bishkek, 1996.

<sup>74</sup> See especially M. V. Shilovskii. *Ch. Ch. Valikhanov i G. N. Potanin: transformatsiia lichnosti v paradigmatkakh frontira; Stepnoi krai Evrazii: istoriko-kulturnye vzaimodeistviia i sovremennost’: tezisy dokladov i soobshchenii mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii / Pod. red. R. M. Zhumasheva, A. P. Tolochko*. Omsk, 2005. Pp. 7-15. This edited volume provides a number of important articles that revise and build upon earlier interpretations of the steppe region, with a focus in a number of the articles on Valikhanov and Potanin.

<sup>75</sup> Marc Bloch. *The Historian’s Craft*. New York, 1953. P. 27.

## SUMMARY

В этой статье Скотт Бейли рассматривает биографию Чохана Валиханова, обращая особое внимание на многоуровневость его личности и подчеркивая тот факт, что он очень много путешествовал. Валиханов получил русское образование и участвовал во многих научно-исследовательских экспедициях по Центральной Евразии, получая поддержку от Российского государства и таких российских научных институтов, как Географическое общество. Исходя из этого некоторые ученые предполагали, что Валиханов – агент российского колониализма. Но это спорно, отчасти потому, что под конец жизни он решил покинуть мир научных и географических исследований и ушел в отставку, чтобы жить в казахской деревне. Есть исследователи, считающие Валиханова предвестником казахского национализма, но эта точка зрения тоже не совсем точна, если принимать во внимание его знатное происхождение (он был потомком Чингисхана). Указанный факт обеспечивал ему и его семье относительно привилегированное положение среди казахов Среднего жуза. Валиханов понимал, что надо делать, чтобы достичь успеха в качестве ученого-путешественника. Его карьера была реализацией этого сценария. Он выбирал свой путь среди различных культурных миров с опорой на собственные языковые и культурные традиции. Чохан Валиханов жил во время кардинальных политических и культурных изменений, которые следует подчеркивать в его биографии больше, чем идентификацию с той или иной группой.