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Response to the Review by Dr. Aminat Chokobaeva

First, I would like to thank Dr. Aminat Chokobaeva, who accepted the invitation to review the book. Dr. Chokobaeva not only carefully read the book but also provided incredibly valuable comments that will elevate my arguments pertaining to the role of the manaps in the national identity formation and modernization of the Qırghız. Here, I have attempted to elucidate my response to the reviewer's comments.

Certainly, Qırghız and Qazaqs are similar in cultural and linguistical aspects, but they are different in national identity formation. In considering the process, some clues seem to lie in following the history of both groups that occurred from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. Before the Russian Empire absorbed the Qazaqs and established its colonial rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century, they shared a certain degree of national identity. This was not only because of the Jungharian invasion that they suffered at the turn of the eighteenth century but also owing to the fact that they had formed the statehood of the Qazaq Khanate in the sixteenth century. Under Russian colonial rule from the middle of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, the Qazaqs' "proto-nationalism" matured sufficiently to serve as the foundation of their eventual modern nationalism. While Russia's rule over the Qazaqs bore an oppressive character, it presented the Qazaqs with the opportunity to cultivate their modern orientation as participants in the colonial administration and education, which led to the formation of Qazaq secular intellectuals. Notably, the colonial newspaper issued by Russian authorities, including the Newspaper of the Steppe Region, played a crucial role as a medium for inculcating the Qazaq national identity among secular intellectuals. By the beginning of the twentieth century, they had begun to issue a series of original newspapers in their language.

Compared to the Qazaqs, the Qırghız decisively lacked the conditions required for national identity formation. They were typical mountain nomads and had divided themselves into several highly independent tribal groups led by chieftains who would compete with each other. Although they possessed a shared identity, the Qırghız failed to unite beyond the tribal unit and thus never formed a state. The surrounding powers, which included the Qoqand Khanate and the Russian Empire, considered the Qırghız troublesome due to their "warlike inclination." However, "dividing and ruling" them was also straightforward. There were some cases in which a super-tribal unification among the Qırghız was sought. This was mainly stimulated by the "Qazaq hegemony." For example, the northern Qırghız tribes temporarily united under the initiative of Ormon Baatır in the middle of the nineteenth century to counter the threat posed by the Qazaq sultan, Kenesari. Interestingly, the middle of the nineteenth century is when the chieftains of the northern Qırghız tribes were referred to as "manaps." The emergence of the title possibly indicates that a certain kind of super-tribal collective identity was assumed among the northern Qırghız tribes.

However, under Russian colonial rule, their collective identity never matured at the national level. Almost all Russian efforts were aimed at maintaining the public order in the Tian Shan mountainous region rather than modernizing the Qırghız. In other words, the Russian Empire did not pay much attention to the Qırghız themselves; the former "encountered" the latter throughout the invasion of the Qoqand Khanate. This undoubtedly resulted in the poor cultivation of modern intellectuals among the Qırghız. Instead, manaps continued to serve as representatives of the Qırghız society.

Nevertheless, it seems unfair to categorize manaps merely as “traditional” chieftains. Manaps went through a transformation at the turn of the twentieth century. Prototypes of modern intellectuals began to appear among them. This can be observed through the rise of figures such as Dür Sooronbayev and Abdikerim Sıdıkov, both of whom had received a Russian higher education and had experience in the colonial administration. However, owing to their lack of experience and resources, Qırghız intellectuals could never afford to lead the movement independently; they were dependent on the Qazaq national movement (Alash). In other words, Qırghız intellectuals had to deal with a “Qazaq hegemony.” The Islamic orientation among the manaps, including Shabdan, was possibly meant to have a restraining effect on the Qazaq hegemony.

Regardless of their varied political orientations, manaps can be viewed as native agents of modernization. They were aware of the “backwardness” of the Qırghız society and acknowledged the need for reform. In reality, Shabdan implemented reforms to construct a Jadid school. However, the quality of the reform remains questionable. As Samuel Huntington’s “king’s dilemma” thesis indicates, it remains unclear whether manaps, including Shabdan, could have foreseen that modernization would ultimately undermine their power base. Apparently, manaps’ social reform in practice could not leave the realm of reproducing the traditional chieftaindom for the nobler purpose of “modernization.” Of course, the socio-political atmosphere surrounding the Qırghız was not sufficiently stable to carry out modernization projects. Instead, as the micro-history of Shabdan and his sons reveals, all they could do was to struggle to survive the uncertain “borderland status” of the region. Their strategy was to expand their networks as much as possible. Shabdan and his family overwhelmed other manaps through their broad connections.

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