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## THE POLICY OF THE TSARIST ADMINISTRATION AND THE SACRED-MYSTICAL PRACTICES OF THE TARANCHIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR RELOCATION TO ZHETYSU

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* This study examines the migration policy of the Russian Empire concerning the Uighurs (Taranchis) in the context of their sacred-mystical practices during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It explores the interplay between state administrative policies and the religious and cultural traditions of the migrants, providing a comprehensive analysis of their adaptation in Zhetysu and the role of sacred practices in the social consolidation of Taranchis' communities within a new socio-cultural environment. *Goals and objectives.* The study seeks to elucidate the relationship between the imperial administration's migration policy and the sacred practices of the Uighurs (Taranchis), while also examining the role of Taranchis' baksis, who performed ritual prayers and incantations. The research evaluates the impact of administrative reforms on the Uighurs' resettlement in Jetisu, analyzes sacred practices as mechanisms of cultural and religious adaptation, assesses the dynamics of social and interethnic interactions within the framework of migration policy, and identifies adaptive strategies that ensured the resilience of Taranchis' communities under external administrative control. The study employs a historical-analytical approach, incorporating contextual and discourse analysis, as well as socio-cultural anthropology, to investigate sacred practices as instruments of cultural identity and social integration. The research is grounded in extensive archival materials, official documents of the imperial administration, and scholarly works on the religious practices and folk beliefs of the Uighurs. *Results.* The findings indicate that the sacred practices of Taranchis' baksis, including prayers and incantations, synthesized elements of the shamanic tradition with Quranic surahs, facilitating their integration into the Kazakh milieu. These practices not only supported cultural and religious adaptation but also played a crucial role in interethnic and social interactions in Jetisu, fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding among diverse ethnic groups. *Conclusion.* The migration policy of the Russian Empire concerning the Uighurs (Taranchis)



and their sacred-mystical practices had a profound impact on ethno-confessional processes in the region, contributing to the emergence of new models of social and religious adaptation.

**Keywords:** Uighurs (Taranchis), Tsarist resettlement policy, administrative reforms, sacred-mystical practices, prayers and spells, ethno-confessional interactions, Zhetysu, sociocultural integration

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## РЕСЕЙ ИМПЕРИЯСЫНЫҢ КӨШІ-ҚОН САЯСАТЫ ШЕҢБЕРІНДЕ ҰЙҒЫРЛАРДЫҢ (ТАРАНШЫ) САКРАЛДЫ-МИСТИКАЛЫҚ ТӘЖРИБЕЛЕРІ

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**Андатпа.** *Kіріспе.* Бұл зерттеу ХІХ ғасырдың соңы – ХХ ғасырдың басындағы Ресей империясының ұйғырларға (тараншыларға) қатысты қоныстандыру саясатын олардың сакралды-мистикалық тәжірибелері контекстінде талдауға арналған. Мемлекеттік әкімшілік саясаттың қоныстанушылардың діни және мәдени дәстүрлерімен өзара әрекеттесуі қарастырылады, бұл олардың Жетісуда бейімделу үдерісін және жаңа әлеуметтік-мәдени кеңістікте тараншы қауымдастықтарының әлеуметтік бірігуіндегі сакралды тәжірибелердің рөлін жан-жақты көрсетуге мүмкіндік береді. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеу патшалық әкімшіліктің қоныстандыру саясаты мен ұйғырлардың (тараншылардың) сакралды тәжірибелері арасындағы өзара байланысын анықтауға, сондай-ақ рәсімдік сиқырлы дұғалар мен ырымдарды орындайтын тараншы бақсыларының рөлін талдауға бағытталған. Зерттеу барысында әкімшілік реформалардың ұйғырлардың Жетісуға қоныс аудару үдерісіне ықпалы зерттеліп, сакралды тәжірибелер мәдени және діни бейімделу элементі ретінде қарастырылады, қоныстандыру саясаты аясындағы әлеуметтік және этносаралық динамика бағаланады, сондай-ақ сыртқы бақылау жағдайында тараншы қауымдастықтарының орнықтылығын қамтамасыз еткен бейімделу механизмдері анықталады. *Әдістеме.* Зерттеу тарихи-талдамалық тәсілді, контекстік және дискурсивтік талдауды, сондай-ақ сакралды тәжірибелерді мәдени сәйкестік пен әлеуметтік интеграция құралы ретінде зерттеу үшін әлеуметтік-мәдени антропология әдістерін қамтиды. Жұмыста мұрағаттық деректер, патшалық әкімшіліктің құжаттары, сондай-ақ ұйғырлардың діни тәжірибелері мен халықтық наным-сенімдеріне арналған зерттеулер белсенді түрде қолданылады. *Нәтижелер.* Зерттеу тараншы бақсыларының сакралды тәжірибелері, оның ішінде сиқырлы дұғалар мен ырымдар, шамандық дәстүр элементтерін Құран сүрелерімен үйлестіргенін көрсетеді, бұл олардың қазақ халқы ортасында интеграциялануына ықпал етті. Бұл тәжірибелер мәдени және діни бейімделуді қамтамасыз етіп қана қоймай, Жетісудағы этносаралық және әлеуметтік өзара әрекеттестіктерде маңызды рөл атқарды, түрлі этникалық топтар арасындағы әлеуметтік

тұтастық пен өзара түсіністікті нығайтуға септігін тигізді. *Қорытынды.* Ресей империясының ұйғырларға (тараншыларға) қатысты қоныстандыру саясаты мен олардың сакралды-мистикалық тәжірибелері аймақтағы этноконфессиялық үдерістерге айтарлықтай ықпал етіп, жаңа әлеуметтік және діни бейімделу үлгілерінің қалыптасуына ықпал етті.

**Түйін сөздер:** Ұйғырлар (тараншы), Ресей империясының көші-қон саясаты, әкімшілік реформалар, сакралды-мистикалық тәжірибелер, дұғалар мен ырымдар, этникалық және дінаралық өзара әрекеттесу, Жетісу, әлеуметтік-мәдени интеграция

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## САКРАЛЬНО-МИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРАКТИКИ УЙГУРОВ (ТАРАНЧИ) В КОНТЕКСТЕ ПЕРЕСЕЛЕНЧЕСКОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ИМПЕРИИ

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* Настоящее исследование посвящено анализу переселенческой политики Российской империи в отношении уйгур (таранчи) в контексте их сакрально-мистических практик в конце XIX – начале XX века. Рассматривается взаимодействие государственной административной политики с религиозными и культурными традициями переселенцев, что позволяет комплексно осветить процесс их адаптации в Жетысу и роль сакральных практик в социальной консолидации таранчинских общин в новом социокультурном пространстве. *Цель и задачи.* Исследование направлено на выявление взаимосвязи между переселенческой политикой царской администрации и сакральными практиками уйгур (таранчи), а также на анализ роли таранчинских бакшей, исполнявших ритуальные молитвы и заговоры. В рамках исследования изучается влияние административных реформ на процесс переселения уйгур в Жетысу, анализируются сакральные практики как элемент культурной и религиозной адаптации, оценивается социальная и межэтническая динамика в контексте переселенческой политики, выявляются адаптационные механизмы, обеспечивавшие устойчивость таранчинских общин в условиях внешнего контроля. Исследование включает историко-аналитический подход, контекстный и дискурсивный анализ, а также применение социокультурной антропологии для изучения сакральных практик как инструмента культурной идентичности и социальной интеграции. В работе активно используются архивные источники, документы царской администрации, а также исследования, посвященные религиозным практикам и народным верованиям уйгур. *Результаты.* Исследования показывают, что сакральные практики таранчинских бакшей, включая молитвы и заговоры, сочетали элементы шаманистской традиции с кораническими сурами, что способствовало их интеграции в среду казахского населения. Эти практики не

только обеспечивали культурную и религиозную адаптацию, но и играли значимую роль в межэтнических и социальных взаимодействиях в Жетысу, способствуя укреплению социальной сплоченности и взаимопонимания между различными этническими группами. *Заключение.* Переселенческая политика Российской империи в отношении уйгур (таранчи) и их сакрально-мистические практики оказали значительное влияние на этноконфессиональные процессы в регионе, способствуя формированию новых моделей социальной и религиозной адаптации.

**Ключевые слова:** Уйгуры (таранчи), переселенческая политика царизма, административные реформы, сакрально-мистические практики, молитвы и заговоры, этноконфессиональные взаимодействия, Жетысу, социокультурная интеграция

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## Introduction

Migration processes in Central Asia during the second half of the 19th century constitute a critical area of study, particularly in the context of the Russian Empire's resettlement policies toward the Uighurs (Taranchis). The Dungan and Uighur uprising in the Ili region during the 1860s and 1870s, driven by Chinese colonial policies, created an opportunity for the Tsarist administration to expand its influence in the region. In 1871, following a military intervention in the Ili region, the territory was placed under the administrative control of the Semirechensk General-Governorship (CSA RK, F. 3., Inv. 1., C. 248., P. 67).

Against this backdrop, the resettlement of the Uighurs (Taranchis) in Jetisu became an integral part of a broader imperial strategy aimed at consolidating newly acquired territories and managing ethno-confessional groups. The administrative reforms of the Russian Empire were accompanied by the introduction of new governance mechanisms, the restructuring of the region's socio-economic framework, and the redistribution of land resources. As part of this policy, Taranchis' communities were granted fertile land, facilitating the development of their traditional agricultural practices and ensuring their economic stability. This study seeks to examine the role of the sacred and mystical practices of Taranchis' baksis in the adaptation of Uighur migrants to their new socio-cultural environment. These practices, which included prayers and ritual incantations, functioned as instruments of religious consolidation and cultural integration. Archival sources indicate that the prayer rituals and sacred acts performed by Taranchis' baksis played a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and interethnic engagement, particularly in their interactions with the Kazakh population (Kunstman, 1984: 20).

This study further examines the ramifications of administrative reforms and interethnic dynamics within the framework of Uighur resettlement. The migratory process entailed a multifaceted adaptive trajectory, wherein Uighur communities employed religious and esoteric practices as mechanisms for the preservation of their cultural identity. This adaptive paradigm unfolded within a broader matrix of socio-economic interdependencies with the indigenous Kazakh populace, ultimately contributing to the consolidation of ethno-confessional equilibrium in Jetisu (Abuseitova, 2001: 56).

An analysis of the Russian Empire's resettlement policies reveals a strategically calibrated effort to transform the southeastern territories of Kazakhstan into a multiethnic landscape, conceived as a pivotal instrument of imperial governance. This process was deliberately aimed at eroding the region's ethnopolitical homogeneity, which, from the perspective of the colonial administration, functioned as an effective mechanism for the long-term neutralization of national liberation movements and the preemption of potential separatist tendencies. The implementation of this strategy reflected a broader imperial discourse centered on institutionalizing a multiethnic framework as a means of reinforcing political and administrative stability in frontier territories (Kolpakovsky, 1875: 82). The strategic incorporation of Uighur populations (Taranchis) was not merely aimed at

expanding the region's demographic and economic foundation but was also meticulously calculated to deploy them as a stabilizing force capable of suppressing localized insurrections and mitigating Chinese geopolitical influence (CSA RK, F. 369, Inv. 1, C. 211, P. 187). Meanwhile, the sacred traditions of the Taranchis, embodied in the ritualistic practices of Taranchis' bakshis, played a pivotal role in maintaining collective identity and facilitating social adaptation in a new geopolitical landscape. These esoteric practices, which incorporated incantations and ceremonial rites infused with Quranic surahs, not only reinforced intra-communal religious cohesion but also served as a conduit for the establishment of stable interethnic and interconfessional relations in the Zhetysu region. Of particular significance was the healing function of the bakshis, whose spiritual and therapeutic interventions, especially in matters of disease treatment and protection against the evil eye, attracted the indigenous Kazakh population. The development of such intercultural interactions within a multiethnic framework provided an operational model through which the imperial administration could strategically manipulate cultural and religious autonomy, utilizing spiritual institutions as instruments of governance and mechanisms for ensuring stability in geopolitically sensitive territories.

Thus, the objective of this study is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the Russian Empire's resettlement policy regarding the Uighur (Taranchis) population within the broader framework of ethno-confessional transformations in the southeastern territories of Kazakhstan during the 19th century. This research is structured around three key inquiries. First, it seeks to identify the geopolitical and socio-economic imperatives that necessitated the strategic incorporation of the Taranchis as an instrument of imperial governance, aimed at suppressing national liberation movements and consolidating administrative control over the region. Second, it examines the role of Taranchis' sacred traditions as a mechanism for the preservation of ethnocultural identity and social integration within a multiethnic milieu. Third, it critically evaluates the impact of the resettlement policy on the formation of enduring ethno-confessional interactions, which not only facilitated interethnic stability but also served as a fundamental pillar in the consolidation of imperial hegemony in Zhetysu.

*The hypothesis of this study* asserts that the resettlement policy of the Russian Empire, which predominantly targeted the Taranchis as a sedentary agrarian population distinct from but ethnically related to the Uyghurs, played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-political landscape of Zhetysu. This policy functioned as an instrument of imperial control aimed at consolidating governance over the region and mitigating the threat of national liberation movements while simultaneously fostering the development of stable ethno-confessional interactions. Although Taranchis have often been classified within the broader Uighur identity in scholarly discourse, their migration to Zhetysu was distinct in scale and character, making them the primary demographic force in the settlement process. Their sacred traditions served as a fundamental mechanism for preserving ethnocultural identity, facilitating social integration, and structuring interactions with the indigenous Kazakh population within the imperial administrative framework.

*The academic significance of this research* lies in its comprehensive analysis of the Russian Empire's resettlement policies with a focus on their impact on ethno-confessional dynamics in Zhetysu. The study also examines the function of Taranchis' sacred traditions as a crucial factor in social adaptation and cultural continuity during the period of imperial expansion. In contrast to traditional approaches that primarily interpret migration through political and economic lenses, this research emphasizes the cultural and religious dimensions that contributed to the emergence of stable interethnic relations. Special attention is given to the role of Taranchis' bakshis whose sacred practices combined Quranic recitations with elements of indigenous ritual traditions. These practices not only reinforced Taranchis' identity but also attracted the local Kazakh population, particularly in contexts of healing and the warding off of malevolent forces. By facilitating deeper socio-cultural integration, these traditions contributed to the long-term stabilization of interethnic relations and the consolidation of imperial authority in the region.



## Materials and Methods

The Russian Empire's resettlement policy in Central Asia, particularly concerning the Taranchis, remains an underexplored subject in academic discourse, despite a growing scholarly focus on migration and imperial strategies in the region. The large-scale population movements of the second half of the 19th century played a pivotal role in reshaping the ethno-confessional landscape of southeastern Kazakhstan. While political and economic dimensions of these resettlements have received scholarly attention, a comprehensive framework that integrates cultural-religious aspects remains a nascent area of inquiry, necessitating further interdisciplinary investigation.

A critical source for examining these ethno-confessional transformations is N.N. Pantusov's seminal work, *"Materials for the Study of the Dialect of the Taranchis of the Kulja District, Vol. 5: Prayers and Incantations of the Taranchis' Bakshis"*, published in Kazan in 1900. This study not only documents linguistic specificities but also reflects N.N. Pantusov's deliberate focus on the esoteric dimensions of Taranchis' spiritual life. He systematically analyzed ritual incantations, healing practices, and protective formulas against the evil eye, highlighting the central role of Taranchis' bakshis in maintaining communal cohesion and facilitating cultural adaptation in the resettlement context. These sacred practices, which blended indigenous shamanic elements with Quranic verses, functioned as mechanisms of social integration and ethnic identity preservation, simultaneously attracting segments of the local Kazakh population. By foregrounding the intersection of migration, religious epistemologies, and imperial governance, Pantusov's work provides a unique vantage point for understanding the complexities of resettlement processes and the strategic role of sacred traditions in sustaining both intra-communal solidarity and broader interethnic interactions within the imperial framework.

The Taranchis', as a distinct socio-ethnic group shaped by the migratory dynamics of Central Asia, occupied a pivotal position in the scholarly inquiries of V.V. Radlov. His meticulous research, particularly in *"Private Studies on the Dialect of the Taranchis"*, provides a comprehensive analysis of their linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics, offering valuable insights into their ethnogenesis and adaptation mechanisms. Resettled from the Chinese-administered Ili Valley to Zhetysu, the Taranchis represented a predominantly agrarian population, a factor that differentiated them from other Turkic communities in the region. Despite their ethnic proximity to the Uyghurs, the Taranchis maintained a distinct socio-economic structure shaped by their historical trajectory. Radlov's research underscores their engagement in agricultural production, interactions with neighboring ethnic groups such as the Sarts and Uzbeks, and their integration into the broader economic networks of the region. His linguistic analysis not only traces the preservation and evolution of the Taranchis' dialect but also highlights the cultural resilience of the Taranchis within the context of Russian colonial administration. Furthermore, his ethnographic observations document the persistence of shamanistic and animistic traditions within their religious practices, despite the overarching influence of Islamic norms. By situating the Taranchis within the broader framework of imperial resettlement policies and regional ethno-confessional transformations, Radlov's scholarship remains foundational for understanding their role in the complex sociocultural landscape of Zhetysu (Radlov, 1886: 12–15).

The research of N.F. Katanov has made a significant contribution to the ethnographic and cultural study of the folk beliefs of Turkic peoples, particularly the Taranchis. In his works, he provides a detailed examination of the magical-mythological perceptions of natural phenomena, uncovering the mechanisms through which these occurrences were interpreted within the traditional Turkic worldview, deeply rooted in shamanistic and animistic practices. Katanov emphasizes that such beliefs were not merely religious in nature but also served a crucial normative function, regulating daily life and social interactions within agrarian communities. He further notes that sacred conceptions of nature functioned not only as explanatory frameworks for natural disasters, such as earthquakes, droughts, and floods, but also as mechanisms for maintaining social stability, ensuring collective adaptation to shifting environmental conditions (Katanov, 1897: 17–19).

In his seminal work *"Divination among the Inhabitants of Eastern Turkestan (1893)"*, N.F. Katanov provides a meticulous ethnographic analysis of the arcane divinatory practices and

esoteric traditions among the Turkic populations, with particular emphasis on the Taranchis' settlements in Hotan, Kashgar, Aksu, and Kham. He systematically categorizes a spectrum of prognostic techniques, including bibliomancy through Quranic verses, hydromancy via cotton-imbued water, scapulimancy involving the calcination of ovine shoulder blades, and cleromantic rites employing dust and lithic fragments. Katanov underscores the profound antiquity and epistemic legitimacy of these practices within the indigenous cognitive framework, arguing that they functioned as both sacralized epistemological tools and sociocultural regulators, governing intercommunal arbitration and decision-making processes. Moreover, he elucidates the extent to which these prognostic traditions were embedded within a transregional intellectual matrix, deeply inflected by Arabic and Persian textual transmissions, including "*One Thousand and One Nights*" and "*Farhad and Shirin*". This intertextual confluence, he posits, facilitated a syncretic knowledge system that amalgamated indigenous mystical heuristics with extrinsic literary and theological paradigms. Within this hermeneutic schema, divination was not merely a ritualized engagement with the metaphysical but also an instrumental modality for structuring cosmological order and ontological coherence among the inhabitants of Eastern Turkestan (Katanov, 1893: 34–56).

In Russian and Western historical scholarship, the resettlement policy of Tsarist Russia has been primarily studied in the context of the geopolitical expansion and economic interests of the Russian Empire. Works by G. Toleubaev (Toleubaev, 1994: 105–107), for example, focus on the socio-economic and political consequences of the resettlements, considering them as a key tool for expanding Russian influence in Central Asia. However, more in-depth studies, such as those by M. Bendersky (Bendersky, 2003) and R. Hittmann (Hittmann, 2001), examine the resettlement policy of Tsarism, particularly in relation to the Uyghurs and Dungans, as part of a broader geopolitical strategy, where ethnic and religious aspects played a pivotal role in ensuring stability in the newly acquired territories.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on the integration of theories of ethnicity and cultural identity, as well as the concept of the geopolitical resettlement policy of the Russian Empire, as presented in the works of scholars such as L. Benedict (Benedict, 2009). This theory views resettlement policy not only as a tool for territorial expansion but also as a strategy for forming multinational societies that function as stable political units within the empire. In the context of the Russian Empire, resettlement policy was used as a means of creating ethnically diverse regions, which contributed to political stability and reduced the risks of nationalist movements. Unlike traditional studies, which emphasize economic and military factors, this research highlights the importance of sacred and cultural aspects, which played a key role in the process of social and religious integration of the Taranchis in the new conditions. In this context, the cultural identity and religious practices of the Taranchis became crucial factors that facilitated their adaptation and consolidation in Zhetysay, which also aligned with the Russian authorities' interests in stabilizing the region and strengthening imperial control. Additional support for this theory can be found in the research of T.N. Cherkashina, who emphasizes the use of resettlement policy not only as a tool for forming ethnically mixed territories but also for establishing long-term political loyalty to the empire (Cherkashina, 2012: 45–57). A significant contribution to the study of social changes among the Taranchis is made by A. Ershov, who analyzes cultural transformations during resettlement, noting the important role of religious traditions in maintaining social stability (Ershov, 2008: 88–102).

This research employs a multifaceted methodological framework that synthesizes historical-sociological and ethnohistorical paradigms, enabling a granular examination of the Russian Empire's resettlement policies concerning the Taranchis within the broader matrix of imperial spatial governance. The inquiry is anchored in a rigorous interrogation of archival repositories, which furnish primary data on demographic reconfigurations, administrative interventions, and the evolving socio-religious modalities of the resettled populations. A critical component of this study is the engagement with N.N. Pantusov's seminal works, which elucidate the ontological dimensions of Taranchis' sacred traditions and their operational function as mechanisms of social cohesion and cultural continuity. Furthermore, the research integrates a diachronic comparative methodology, juxtaposing the Russian imperial settlement schema with analogous migration governance models in other colonial regimes,

thereby situating the study within a broader discourse on state-engineered demographic engineering and ethno-confessional restructuring.

### Discussion

The Taranchis constitute a Muslim ethnos historically situated in Eastern Turkestan (contemporary Xinjiang, China), distinguished by their linguistic affiliation with the Taranchis dialect of the Uyghur language. Their ethno-cultural identity emerged through a highly intricate historical process that entailed the syncretic amalgamation of Islamic doctrinal frameworks, pre-Islamic animistic and shamanistic substrata, and localized magico-ritualistic paradigms. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the ethnonym «Taranchis'» functioned not merely as an ethno-linguistic identifier but also as a socio-economic category, primarily denoting sedentary agriculturalists, artisans, and mercantile groups. Pre-revolutionary ethnographic and historiographical sources, including the seminal works of G.G. Gins and P.M. Pantusov, underscore the inextricable entanglement of Taranchis identity with localized sacred epistemologies, emphasizing the pivotal role of ritualistic praxis in sustaining social cohesion and facilitating cultural resilience within the polyethnic milieu of the region.

The magico-religious traditions of the Taranchis constitute a paradigmatic case of ritualistic syncretism, wherein Qur'anic invocatory formulas and canonical Islamic supplications are interwoven with archaic shamanistic and apotropaic modalities, thus reflecting the deep structural hybridity of their cosmological epistemes. G.G. Gins, in his seminal 1911 treatise "*The Taranchis and the Dungans*", provides a meticulous exegesis of the Taranchis divinatory and curative methodologies, delineating their reliance on a sophisticated corpus of theurgical interventions. These include incantatory formulas derived from Qur'anic verses, hydromantic rites involving consecrated liquids, osteomantic divination via pyro-osteological scapulimancy, and the deployment of talismanic objects inscribed with sacred lexemes. According to Gins, these ritual technologies transcended their immediate therapeutic and prophylactic utility, operating as F.amental mechanisms for the regulation of intersubjective relationality, mercantile transactions, and communal stability. Within the semiotic framework of Taranchis cosmology, the performativity of sacred utterances was imbued with intrinsic ontological potency, capable of effectuating transformations across both the material and metaphysical domains. This evidences a profound interpenetration of Islamic discursive practices with indigenous shamanistic epistemologies, underscoring the complex ritual economy that structured Taranchis' spiritual life (Gins, 1911: 104).

The magical-religious practices of the Taranchis' communities constituted a dynamic interplay between Islamic theurgical frameworks and pre-Islamic Turkic shamanistic traditions, forming a distinct system of ritualized knowledge. P.M. Pantusov, in his seminal study, examines this intricate fusion, emphasizing that the sacred texts of the Taranchis' communities often exhibited a dual structure: while invoking Quranic verses and Islamic metaphysical concepts, they simultaneously preserved archaic Turkic incantatory motifs. He documents numerous examples of prayers and charms used by the Taranchis' communities to counteract malevolent forces, regulate fate, and secure economic prosperity, particularly in the domains of trade and household stability (Pantusov, 1900: 47). These ritual utterances, frequently accompanied by the use of talismanic objects and whispered spells, functioned not merely as mechanisms of personal protection but as integral components of collective ritual frameworks, reinforcing socio-religious cohesion and serving as adaptive strategies within the volatile political and economic landscape of the region.

G.G. Gins explores the sociocultural significance of the magical practices of the Taranchis' communities, underscoring their role as both protective mechanisms and regulatory instruments within communal structures. He identifies a diverse range of divinatory techniques, including hydromancy with cotton discs, scapulomancy through the examination of burned sheep bones, and lithomantic interpretations of patterns in dust and sand, all of which reflect deeply embedded shamanistic substrata. According to Gins, these divinatory practices were not static remnants of a bygone era but rather evolved within the broader Islamized cultural paradigm, adapting to shifting epistemological frameworks while maintaining their essential function as mediators of cosmic order.

He further argues that the resilience of these ritual systems demonstrates the extent to which the spiritual practices of the Taranchis' communities remained anchored in an indigenous epistemology, even as they assimilated external influences from Islamic doctrinal traditions and Persian-Arabic esoteric texts. This capacity for cultural adaptation, in his assessment, underscores the multifaceted nature of the magical traditions of the Taranchis' communities as both a repository of historical continuity and a site of innovative religious syncretism (Gins, 1911: 110).

The magical traditions of the Taranchis constitute a highly intricate system in which Islamic mystical elements are seamlessly integrated with pre-Islamic shamanistic practices. This synthesis underscores the broader theoretical framework in which magic operates not merely as a religious or spiritual construct but as a mechanism for socio-cultural adaptation and resilience in times of mobility and transformation. P.M. Pantusov highlights that the Taranchis employed an extensive repertoire of incantations and amulets, structurally incorporating both Arabic-Persian textual formulas and indigenous ritualistic elements (Pantusov, 1900: 47). This dynamic interplay of traditions exemplifies a process of religious hybridization, wherein Islamic sacred texts simultaneously functioned as instruments of divine supplication and vehicles for magical intervention. In this context, the notion of «ritual pragmatism» proves particularly relevant, suggesting that magical rites were not merely symbolic but also served as utilitarian strategies for ensuring social and economic stability amid shifting historical contingencies (Eliade, 1951: 120–135).

A defining feature of Taranchis' magical traditions was the ritualistic power of verbal formulas, which combined conventional Islamic prayers with distinct incantatory expressions imbued with performative efficacy. G. Gins observes that within Taranchis' ceremonial structures, the acoustic properties of spoken words played a fundamental role, as the modulation of sound and rhythm intensified their perceived spiritual potency (Gins, 1910: 67–74). This phenomenon aligns with the broader theoretical concept of “*sonic magic*” which permeates various Turkic cultural traditions, where the spoken word is believed to exert an immediate influence on reality. Such mechanisms were also central to divinatory practices, particularly those that employed sacred texts not merely as sources of religious instruction but as instruments for predictive insight. B.A. Rybakov's research further substantiates this, demonstrating that among Turkic societies, divinatory rituals systematically integrated textual exegesis with natural elements such as water, stones, and fire—an approach that reflects the deep structural logic underpinning these traditions (Rybakov, 2009: 91).

Material culture played an equally pivotal role in Taranchis' magical traditions, as specific objects were imbued with ritual significance and perceived as conduits of supernatural power. N.G. Timofeeva's studies reveal that certain plants, minerals, and inscribed artifacts were regarded as repositories of sacred energy, capable of shaping and manipulating external forces (Timofeeva, 2012: 78). Among the most prevalent were metal and stone amulets, as well as inscribed talismans (*hatt*), which were frequently employed in protective rituals. These objects not only served ritualistic functions but also operated as markers of social identity, signaling adherence to particular esoteric traditions. The intersection of material objects and magical belief systems is further elucidated by H.W. Goetz, who argues that in societies characterized by high degrees of religious syncretism, ritual artifacts function as mediatory instruments between disparate theological frameworks, facilitating their convergence within a single cosmological paradigm (Goetz, 1994: 55).

Taranchis' purification and apotropaic rituals further illustrate the structural complexity of their magical system and its embeddedness within broader Central Asian spiritual traditions. Water, a central purifying element within Islam, was frequently combined with botanicals and mineral substances to produce ritual concoctions believed to ward off malevolent forces. Similar purification rites are well-documented among other Turkic groups, where ritual ablutions were systematically paired with the recitation of incantatory formulas to amplify their spiritual efficacy. This attests to the multifaceted nature of Taranchis' magical traditions, in which textual and material elements coalesce to form a cohesive system of sacred interactions. Furthermore, this dynamic underscores the dual functionality of magic: both as a pragmatic instrument for environmental adaptation and as a metaphysical conduit for engaging with transcendent forces.



An analysis of the Taranchis' magical traditions necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes historical, anthropological, and religious studies methodologies. The distinctive interplay between verbal, material, and ritual components highlights the evolving nature of these practices as they negotiated the intersection of Islamization and indigenous spiritual frameworks. By applying contemporary theoretical models – such as structuralist analysis of sacred texts and cross-cultural comparisons of magical traditions – it becomes possible to delineate both the universal and regionally specific dimensions of Taranchis' magic. Such an inquiry not only refines our understanding of the religious syncretism at work but also provides deeper insight into the epistemological frameworks that shaped the Taranchis' cosmological worldview and their conceptualization of human agency within the broader metaphysical order.

The magical-religious practices of the Taranchis constituted a complex phenomenon in which elements of folk magic and Islamic ritualism were interwoven, forming a unique system of interaction with both the sacred and social realms. In the context of political instability and social transformations, these rituals played a crucial adaptive role, enabling the Taranchis' to navigate uncertainty and regulate key aspects of their lives. N.Ya. Benashvili emphasizes that the religious practices of the Taranchis extended beyond canonical Islamic rituals, incorporating elements of folk magic aimed at addressing pressing life concerns such as protection from malevolent spirits, ensuring familial prosperity, and achieving success in trade (Benashvili, 1979: 74). This is corroborated by the presence of specific prayer formulas and incantations in which Quranic texts were combined with archaic ritualistic practices, reflecting a profound level of religious syncretism.

The analysis of Taranchis' magical-religious beliefs in the works of G. Gins and P. Pantusov demonstrates that Islamization did not displace shamanistic and folk magical traditions but rather facilitated their integration into religious practice. G. Gins observes that the Taranchis employed amulets, enchanted objects, and sacred texts not only for protection against malevolent forces but also as a means of controlling fate, highlighting the distinctly pragmatic orientation of their magical beliefs (Gins, 1910: 45–78). P. Pantusov, in turn, argues that these magical practices reinforced social cohesion within the community, strengthening collective identity and shaping traditional norms of behavior (Pantusov, 1907: 12–47). Furthermore, the magical-religious rituals of the Taranchis placed significant emphasis on the sacralization of natural objects such as water, plants, and stones, which were imbued with special properties and employed in ritualistic practices to establish a connection with the spiritual world.

Thus, the magical-religious practices of the Taranchis functioned not only as a means of engaging with the transcendent but also as a mechanism of social adaptation that enabled the community to maintain cultural cohesion amid religious and political changes. The syncretism of Islamic and folk magical elements attests to the flexibility of traditional religiosity, which was capable of integrating diverse forms of beliefs and rituals, ensuring their persistence within the dynamic sociocultural landscape of Eastern Turkestan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Pre-revolutionary studies on the peoples of Central Asia were inextricably linked to the colonial policies of the Russian Empire. The ethnographic and religious characteristics of local communities were not merely subjects of academic inquiry but also tools of imperial governance aimed at classifying and controlling subjugated populations. Particular emphasis was placed on religious syncretism, in which Islamic traditions were interwoven with pre-Islamic magico-mystical practices. This framework allowed local beliefs to be depicted not as independent systems but as residual, archaic elements allegedly destined for gradual eradication through imperial «civilizing» influence. The documentation of magical rituals, talismans, divinations, and incantations thus served a dual purpose: on the one hand, it provided valuable insights into religious culture, yet on the other, it reinforced a colonial narrative that framed indigenous traditions as relics of the past, requiring «enlightenment» and «modernization» in accordance with imperial objectives. Consequently, even the most detailed and meticulous ethnographic accounts ultimately contributed to a broader ideological project that portrayed local populations as religiously primitive, perpetually reliant on mystical practices, and therefore amenable to governance through their regulation and control.

Amid colonial pressures, magico-religious practices functioned not merely as spiritual exercises but as mechanisms for preserving collective identity. In a rapidly shifting political landscape, traditional forms of Islam, augmented by pre-existing belief systems, emerged as both conduits for engagement with the sacred and instruments of social adaptation and resilience. While imperial authorities perceived these practices as markers of backwardness, in reality, they reinforced communal cohesion, ensuring stability in the face of external intervention. Colonial scholarship meticulously cataloged and systematized these phenomena, yet in doing so, it unwittingly revealed that magico-religious traditions were not static vestiges of a bygone era but rather dynamic, adaptive frameworks that enabled local populations to navigate political uncertainty. In this regard, imperial studies – intended to serve the interests of colonial administration – paradoxically underscored the extent to which indigenous communities leveraged their spiritual traditions as a resource for maintaining cultural and religious autonomy despite the pressures of imperial rule.

## Results

The magical practices, prayers, and incantations of the Taranchis (Uyghur settlers) in Zhetysu during the late 19th and early 20th centuries constituted an integral part of their cultural and religious system. In the context of adaptation to new territorial and socio-political realities, these ritual practices functioned not only as apotropaic mechanisms ensuring individual protection but also as instruments for maintaining collective order and normative regulation within the community. Their persistence and evolution reflect the complex interplay between pre-Islamic traditions, Islamic theurgy, and local social institutions. This chapter examines the role of prayers and incantations in Taranchis' culture, analyzing their magical, social, and religious functions (Zheleznyak, 2014: 122–126).

The migration of the Taranchis to Zhetysu in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was part of a broader movement involving Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples of Central Asia. This process was shaped by a combination of political and economic factors, including internal migrations within the Russian Empire, shifts in administrative boundaries, and the socio-economic transformation of the region. Additionally, differences between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles, traditional agricultural practices, and attitudes toward land ownership played a crucial role in shaping settlement patterns. One of the defining characteristics of this migration was a distinctive form of religious syncretism, in which traditional Islam occupied a central place while incorporating elements of shamanism, magical practices, and folk cults. Despite the ongoing processes of Islamization, the religious life of the Taranchis' remained multilayered, reflecting not only their ethnocultural heritage but also the social dynamics resulting from resettlement. As they adapted to new territorial realities, religious and magical-ritual practices took on added significance as mechanisms for preserving collective identity and regulating daily social interactions.

Archival materials, including documents from the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and various ethnographic studies, indicate that under the colonial administration of the Russian Empire, the Taranchis remained committed to traditional Islam despite strict administrative policies and oversight by colonial authorities. One of the key objectives of the colonial administration was to monitor and regulate religious affairs, particularly through control over the Jadidist movement, which was intended to reinforce the governance of local populations. However, the Taranchis not only upheld Islamic doctrinal principles but also continued to integrate their established ritual practices into the broader framework of communal norms and mechanisms for resolving social conflicts. These magico-religious rituals functioned not only as protective and adaptive strategies but also as tools for safeguarding against external threats, maintaining internal cohesion, and asserting cultural autonomy. As a result, their religious life represented a complex synthesis of doctrinal Islam and indigenous beliefs, enabling the community to preserve its identity in the face of political and social pressures.

The protocols of the meetings of the Collegium of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the Kazakh ASSR and their accompanying materials represent a unique empirical corpus, allowing the reconstruction of the complex processes of sociopolitical mobilization, the

transformation of ethnic identity, and the formation of autonomist aspirations among the Taranchis' population in the Zhetysu province during the 1920s (AP RK, F. 141., Inv. 18., C. 167., Pp. 48–54). The reports by A.R. Alshansky and T. Logachev, addressed to the Kazkraykom of the VKP(b), demonstrate the polysemy of the Taranchis' autonomist movement, which combined elements of political resistance, ethnic consolidation, and geopolitical orientation.

An analysis of the presented materials allows for the interpretation of the Taranchis' autonomist aspirations as a response to the structural crisis of the early Soviet administrative model, characterized by uncertainty in the regulation of land and water resources and the institutional weakness of regional governance (Alshansky, 1927: 27). A.R. Alshansky's report emphasizes not only the numerical significance of the Taranchis community but also its cultural features, particularly the continued appeal to baksy (shamans) as an important element of social and spiritual life. Despite the establishment of Soviet authority, the Taranchis continued to actively practice traditional sacred and mystical rites.

The data from the report indicate that appeals to baksy remained frequent even under the harsh state anti-religious policies. This is because the baksy not only performed rituals and healing but also played a role as mediators in resolving social conflicts and stabilizing collective consciousness. In the context of changing socio-economic conditions and migration, such practices remained an important tool for adaptation, ensuring the stability of traditional ways of life.

The numerical concentration of the Taranchis', reaching up to 70,000 people in the Dzsharkent district and up to 200,000 in the Almaty district, exacerbated the situation, as the community maintained cultural autonomy while actively reproducing ethno-confessional traditions. A. Rozybakiyev's program, based on the principles of democratic centralism, represented an attempt to adapt the political structure of the region to its ethnocultural features. However, its influence was unable to displace the deep sacred roots of the traditional organization of communal life (Rozybakiyev, 2003: 15–28). A. Rozybakiyev proposed the integration of autonomist aspirations through inclusive mechanisms that minimized class polarization, which made the movement ideologically flexible and broad in scope.

The autonomist strategies of the Taranchis were reflected in cultural and political initiatives, as evidenced by the autonomy plans for the Xinjiang province developed by A. Rozybakiyev (AP RK, F. 141, Inv. 18, C. 312, P. 27). These plans testify to the cross-border mobility of political ideas, integrating the regions of Central Asia. The internationalization of the autonomist projects demonstrates not only the geopolitical ambitions of the Taranchis elite but also their desire to legitimize their actions by creating institutional counterparts to neighboring territories, thus strengthening their resilience against repressive measures by Soviet authorities (Khasanova, 2000: 95–118).

The sociocultural and economic structure of the region was a complex conglomerate of ethno-confessional and social groups, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Dungans, Uzbeks, Tatars, Russians, and Taranchis. A.R. Alshansky's report emphasizes that the ethnic diversity was both a factor leading to constant conflicts and the basis for the potential of interethnic cooperation. Special attention was given to land and water issues, which formed the basis of the economic activity of the majority of the population. The insufficient development of policies in this area generated numerous contradictions, contributing to the intensification of regional political crises (Materials on land and water disputes, 1916: 245–256).

During the early decades of Soviet rule, the Taranchis persisted in adhering to their sacral-magical traditions, underscoring the remarkable resilience of their ethnocultural framework amid ideological repression and socio-economic transformations. Despite the Soviet state's aggressive secularization policies aimed at eradicating so-called «vestiges of the past» magical-ritualistic practices remained an integral component of their quotidian existence. These practices fulfilled a multifaceted function, intertwining religious, apotropaic, and socio-regulatory dimensions, enabling the Taranchis not only to navigate the complexities of their evolving sociopolitical environment but also to reinforce communal cohesion. Ritualistic engagements – including incantations, talismanic protections, and ceremonial interventions – were perceived as instrumental in fortifying social

structures while simultaneously serving as mechanisms of resistance against both natural adversities and the repressive apparatus of the state. In the context of institutional disintegration and the erosion of traditional societal configurations, these practices persisted as alternative modalities for conflict resolution and collective identity maintenance. Their endurance throughout the Soviet period attests to the intricacy of the Taranchis' integration into the Soviet administrative paradigm and highlights the profound entrenchment of their sacral-magical epistemology, which continued to operate as a vital substratum of their cultural legacy despite its official proscription.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of pre-revolutionary sources demonstrates the significant influence of Tsarist resettlement policies on the Taranchis, contributing to the formation of their ethnocultural identity, which combined elements of traditional Islam and shamanic practices. During their resettlement in Zhetysu, the Taranchis continued to maintain their magical-religious customs, reflecting a high level of cultural resilience amidst political changes. Despite the pressures on Islam and Muslim institutions imposed by the Russian colonial administration, the Taranchis' preserved their distinctiveness, actively using magical practices as a means of regulating social relations and defending against external threats. It should be noted that the Uyghurs and Taranchis resettled in Zhetysu, despite differences in ethnic affiliation, were part of the Karluk group, and while they differed in some aspects, their religious practices shared common features, enabling them to find points of contact and mutual understanding with the region's indigenous people.

The magical practices of the Taranchis played an important role in the social structure and organization, serving not only as part of religious rituals but also as a mechanism for social adaptation and regulation. The syncretism between Islamic and shamanic traditions contributed to the preservation of their spiritual and social resilience, allowing the Taranchis to maintain their ethnocultural identity while adapting to changes in the Russian Empire and later in Soviet Russia. These practices became an essential element in forming collective survival strategies in the new socio-political conditions, influenced by both Russian imperial policies and Bolshevik modernization.

The analysis of pre-revolutionary authors also shows that the process of adaptation of the Taranchis' in Zhetysu was not always smooth. When land allotments, mainly pasture lands, were allocated to the Taranchis, the Kazakhs expressed dissatisfaction, highlighting tensions between ethnic groups. Despite the favorable conditions for agriculture, the magical and religious practices of the Taranchis', like those of the Kazakhs, were similar to local beliefs. Traditional Islam, which had similarities between the Taranchis and the Kazakhs, contributed to the formation of shared views and understanding of the world. These factors underscore the importance of studying the processes of ethnocultural changes, as well as the interaction between religious and magical practices in the context of colonial and post-colonial transformations that influenced the development of adaptation and survival strategies under imperial and Soviet rule.

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CSA RK — Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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