

The political status and ethnic identity of Siberian nomadic “aliens” in the first half of the 19 century

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Abstract

The article refers to the situation of the peoples of Siberia, who were part of the Russian Empire in the first half of the 19 century, which is officially called “inorodtsy” (“aliens”). The author analyzes the political status of special category - “nomadic aliens”, which included Buryats, Tatars, Khakass, Yakuts and others in the context of their ethnic identity. Historical fate of these people has repeatedly in the past were connected within the nomadic Empires of Huns, Turks, Mongols. In the later Middle Ages was the separation between them. The coming of Russian state in Siberia united their within new Empire. Because they had a significant population, cattle-breeding, a complex system of ruling Russian tsars had to carry out a special policy. At the same time used the experience of earlier Empires, in particular, the system of tribute – *Jassak*. So these people were endowed with a special status, which has been fixed in the *Charter on Governing Siberian Inorodtsy (aliens)* of 1822. The article describes their rights and responsibilities, as well as particular attitudes towards the state. These peoples have occupied an intermediate position between the category of “vagrant aliens” and “sedentary aliens”. An important feature of the category of “nomadic aliens” was the self-government in the form of steppe council. Also it’s maintained a number of benefits, such as exemption from military service. It is concluded that the dual nature of the status of “nomadic aliens” - on the one hand, it provided patronage compared with other nations. and on the other. contributed to the discrimination in the future.

Keywords: Russian Empire, Siberia, political status, ethnic identity, “nomadic aliens”, policy, the first half of the 19 century.

The contemporary ethnic processes are rooted in history. The history of the peoples of Siberia has had the periods laying foundation for their future development.

The Russian history of the early 19 century is interesting by the fact that a part of the population had the status of *inorodtsy* (aliens). This term was used in reference to those of different descent from Russians and who had certain privileges and a special form of governing. In addition, they had to live in a certain area and to have their own specific occupations. Their privileges included the rights to practice their faith, to maintain their traditional lifestyle, to be exempted from some empire-wide duties, for example, the majority of them were exempted from the military service. In fact, these people were equated to the status of a class, although they included many ethnic groups inhabiting different parts of the empire.

The term *alien* was markedly different from the English *native* and the French *indigene*, as well as from the Dutch *inlander*. Although B. Anderson writes about the “imagined community”, considering Russia to fall under this category [Anderson 1991 : 102-103], there were other reasons for the emergence of the ethnic identity in such communities of “aliens”, in particular, the “nomadic aliens”, known as the Altaians, Buryats, Siberian Tatars, Khakas and, especially, Yakuts.

According to article 1208 of *The Code of Laws on the Status* of the Russian Empire, all aliens are divided into:

- Siberian aliens, especially Siberian Kyrgyz;
- Samoyeds of Arkhangelsk province;

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Nomadic aliens of Stavropol region;
 Kalmyks, wandering in Astrakhan and Stavropol provinces;
 Jews [*Code of Laws...* 1857 : 246].

Unlike the Jews, who, once converted into Christianity, ceased to be aliens, eastern aliens were such by origin and the conversion did not change their status. On the other hand, eastern aliens could cease to be aliens in case of stopping their nomadic life, thus becoming sedentary, whereas that was not the case for the Jews.

When studying a history of any multiethnic state, for better understanding of historical facts, events and phenomena, it is important to consider the historical and cultural identity of the peoples and the interrelations between them. The Russian Empire is an outstanding example of such a state. The imperial dimension of the Russian history has now become one of the popular issues of historiography. Overcoming the ideological concept of “the Russian Empire” and the expansion of the research narrative have enriched it and opened great prospects for the academic study. Russia became an empire, that is to say a world power, due to “being increased” by Siberia. Among the peoples who inhabited Siberia in 16–17 centuries the most numerous were Turkic-speaking peoples - the ancestors of the Siberian Tatars, Altaians, Tuvans, Khakas, and Yakuts. Economically, all of them were based on the nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism. In addition, some of them formed their own states. Thus, arriving in Siberia, Russian tsars and then emperors first had to establish the relationship with these peoples on a par with the major ethnic group of a region – in case with the Buryats, for example, with other Mongol peoples, who stood behind them and depended on their state.

The common destiny of these peoples, or rather their ancestors, started in the Bronze Age, the era of the first nomads of Siberia – the Scythian Cultural Circle. In the vast Eurasian space there developed a unified equine culture, with a related cosmological ideas and a set of beliefs. The steppe and forest-steppe space formed the nomadic psychology opposing the psychology of settled farmers. For centuries, this cultural and historical community was supported and developed by the Hun Power (3 century BC–AD 2 century) and ancient Turkic Khaganats (6–8 centuries). The unity between many peoples of the steppe also benefited from the special forms of the potestary organization. Eventually, by the middle of the first millennium BC the following ethnic groups became dominant among ancient Turkic peoples: the Ashina-Turks, Kipchaks, Kyrgyz, Tele, Uyghurs. Along with the state, they created a unique system of writing - Orkhon-Yenisei runic. “Moreover, they created their own ethnic and cultural world within Eurasia, which not only survived the Mongols, but eventually assimilated them on the most part of the territory. The Turks were the first and only carriers of the steppe nomadic culture, who came to the Siberian taiga, giving birth to the Yakut people,” - writes L.R. Pavlinskaya [Pavlinskaya 2006 : 93]. The success of the medieval Oghuz Turks in Western Asia, and then Mongols headed by Genghis Khan was due, to a great extend, to the success of their predecessors. Among the Turks of Siberia, the ancient Kyrgyz, ancestors of the Khakas people, apparently created the most advanced forms of statehood at the forest-steppe boundary [Istoriya Khakasii... 1993 : 44–72]. Gradually, as the main centers of the Turkic ethnogenesis began to shift to the west, in 8–9 centuries, consolidated Mongol tribes became prevalent [Klyashtorny 2006 : 17]. Thus, the ancestors of the Siberian Turks faced powerful Mongol states and tribal alliances.

The 10–11 centuries are believed to be the boundary that divided the Mongols and the Turks forever [Klyashtorny 2006 : 113–117]. Under the influence of the Far Eastern culture and Buddhism, the Mongols began to incline to China and Tibet, fighting for dominance in East Asia. For the first time in history, the Genghis Khan Empire moved beyond the Eurasian space and occupied other empires, trying to combine entire civilizations under one sovereign power. To some extent, the interests of the Siberian Mongols and the

Turks matched, but starting from the 14 century, the disintegration of the Empire reached its peak. The boundaries of Genghis Khan's sons' uluses (regions) coincided with the boundaries of the civilizations that their father had tried to unite. Moreover, they came under the influence of the latter and quickly became assimilated. Actually, Mongolia saw a further collapse of the state into smaller fiefdoms. Under such circumstances, the Siberian Turks faced a dilemma. The potestary structures like the Khanate ceased to be strong enough, the writing was forgotten, the cultural communication started to decline.

After that the ways of the Siberian Turks parted. Yakuts became taiga inhabitants and got isolated in their *alases* (1). Siberian Tatars had been trying to keep the heritage of the Golden Horde for centuries. The ancestors of the Altaian, Khakas, Tuvan and other peoples of the Sayan-Altai area were ruled by western Mongol khans, and then subjected to the expansion of the Qing China.

The movement of Russian pathfinders again embroiled these ethnic groups under the rule of one vast power - Russia, the Russian state, the successor of the Eurasian empires of antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Again, their historical fate began to develop under the influence of similar historical factors: policy, economic trends, and cultural climate. L.I. Sherstova believes that the 17–18 centuries witnessed a new round of Siberian peoples ethnogenesis, who were in a transitional state, at least, the people of southern and central Western Siberia [Sherstova 1997 : 114–148 ; Sherstova 2002 : 97]. It is true that both the Russian state and the local population demonstrated mutual understanding in respect of forming a public order of the same nature and going back to the form adopted in the preceding Eurasian empires of Turks and Mongols.

According to the *Charter on Governing Siberian Inorodtsy (aliens)* of 1822, they were classified as “nomadic” and a specific government was provided for them. The attitude of tsar authorities towards this group of peoples determined the geopolitical situation in Siberia. They were to indicate the Russian presence in the region.

Over 300 years, the government of the Russian state created a specific administrative system. In several centuries, there was a further development of the system, due to historical circumstances, both external and internal. That involved the use of the government's experience from other regions of the Empire, adopting and spreading administrative methods and forms throughout the region. The cancelation of nonviable state institutions and establishment of new ones proved most effective. At a certain moment, after all the efforts, they managed to elaborate a most reasonable and well-established government model, which existed until 1917.

Table 1 Siberian Turks and Mongols in Russia (first half of the 19 century)

Peoples	Number	Joining/Annexation date
Altaians	4,400 (late 18 century) 18,500 (1859)	1756
Buryats	116,000 (1795) 240,000 (1859)	1727
Siberian Tatars	29,000 (late 18 century)	Late 16 century
Khakas	16,000 (late 18 century) 25,000 (1859)	1707
Yakuts	100,000 (1795) 196,000 (1859)	1632

In 1803 the Governor-generalship of Siberia was formed. In 1822 it was divided into two Governor-generalships, western and eastern. Altaians, Siberian Tatars, Khakas were ruled by Governor-General of

Western Siberia, with the administrative center first in Tobolsk and, from 1839, in Omsk. Buryats and Yakuts were submitted to Governor-General of Eastern Siberia. The Eastern Siberian Governor-generalship administered from Irkutsk.

The Charter was developed by a Siberian Governor-General M.M.Speransky and his colleague G.S. Batenkov. It regulated all aspects of indigenous peoples life: economic, administrative, judicial, cultural, and social.

Some of them occupied a special place and were called “nomadic aliens”. Their status was finally enshrined in the Charter. The main idea of the Charter was gradual convergence and fusion between the aliens and Russians. Under the Charter, the first were divided into three categories: “sedentary”, “nomadic” and “vagrant”.

Table 2 Features of Siberian aliens

Categories	Features	Peoples
Sedentary	- dwelling in villages and towns, - governing like that of state peasants, - farming	Most Siberian Tatars
Nomadic	- seasonal migrations, - governing by common law, - steppe authorities, - cattle-breeding	Altaians, Buryats, Khakas, Yakuts
Vagrant	- lack of permanent settlements like villages and towns, - governing by common law, - hunting, fishing, gathering	Tungusic, Paleoasiatic and Finno-Samoyed peoples

The status “sedentary”, actually, did not differ from the status of the Russian state peasants, as they were also engaged in farming and lived in settled villages. The same laws as the laws established for farmers guided their everyday life. Typically, communities were managed by elected elders, with the authority to distribute land. Therefore, there was only one step to transfer them into the class of peasants. On the contrary, “vagrant” aliens, inhabitants of tundra and taiga, led a hunting way of life and were also involved in fishing and gathering. Most of them did not have permanent home, being in constant motion on the vast expanses of Siberia. They were not subject to the laws of the empire and mostly they were guided by common law. The administration was in the hands of tribal elders, who, however, were controlled by the tribal assembly. They paid a tribute in furs. The most important issues, such as crimes, fell under jurisdiction of the Crown authorities.

“Nomadic” aliens had a special status. In general, the term “nomadic” is semantically close to the term “vagrant”. Nevertheless, the status of the first is markedly different from the status of the latter, and the status of “settled”, as well. For example, in contrast to the “settled”, they lived by their own laws. They had a separate government, but in addition to tribal authorities, they still had the council and the steppe council, created by the territorial principle. In addition, part of the “nomadic” aliens went to military service, Buryat Cossacks, in particular. The administration was self-funded by nomadic aliens, which was not the case with vagrant ones.

The settled equated with state peasants and farmers. They were mostly Siberian Tatars. They assimilated more quickly than other aliens.

The Charter:

- secured the aliens the land on which they lived;

- determined the size and method of payment of tribute - *yasak*;
- regulated commerce, by allowing to trade all the year round not only in aliens settlements but at other places, too;
- extended the national criminal law on the aliens;
- allowed aliens to study at schools;
- set religious tolerance;
- granted aliens the right to be governed by their chiefs;
- forbade Russians to settle on aliens land without permission;
- provided the tribal elite (*knyazets, toyons, taishi, zaisans, shulenga*) with the privileges they had had within their tribes;
- preserved the tribal community.

The tribal administration consisted of a chief and one or two assistants. The alien (local) council was managed by a head, and consisted of two elected members and a secretary. The steppe council consisted of a chairman, approved by the Governor-General, heads of each group in that administrative unit, and elected assessors.

Duties of the Council included:

- population recording,
- property recording,
- distribution of the tribute,
- promotion of agriculture and industry,
- appeals to a higher authority.

The responsibilities of the local councils and tribal administrations were to collect the tribute and improve the life of the population.

Table 3 Structure of Yakut Self-government

Level	Structures
Yakutsky district	<i>Stepnaya Duma / Steppe Council</i> - <i>Glavny Rodonachal'nik /</i> Chairman, -seven Permanent Members (Ulus Heads), -seven Temporary Members, elected from each ulus, -Secretary
<i>Ulus</i> (an administrative unit)	<i>Inorodcheskaya Uprava / Ulus Council</i> -Ulus Head, -two Elected Members, -Courier, -Secretary
<i>Nasleg</i> (a territorial group)	<i>Rodovoe Upravlenie / Nasleg Administration</i> -Big Chief, -three Foremen, -Smallpox Vaccinator, -Corporal, -Secretary
Kin	Chief

We can see that Yakut self-government had a specific middle level – *nasleg*. Thus, the Charter allowed various forms of social organization.

Since the 18 century, the “nomadic” aliens started practicing agriculture, developing market relations and trade. The needs of the local governments contributed to the development of education. As early as in the beginning of the 19 century, there were schools for Buryats, Khakas and Yakuts, providing primary education. A part of the “nomadic” aliens began to live in towns, changing their lifestyles and absorbing some elements of the urban culture. Then they began to introduce the healthcare system. Among them, there developed a layer of educated people - a prerequisite to the formation of intelligentsia. The first half of the 19 century saw the emergence of the social movement. In ethnic terms, one of the interesting examples was the formation of the Khakas nation out of a conglomerate of related Turkic groups of the Minusinsk Hollow.

The first half of the 19 century was the most favorable period for the development of “nomadic” aliens. The Charter of 1822 actually provided them with specific political and cultural autonomy. In political terms, there was approved a three-stage hierarchy of elected governments: Head of a community - Local Administration - Steppe Council. There started the elaboration of *The Code of Laws on the Steppe “Nomadic” Aliens of Eastern Siberia*, which consisted of more than 500 clauses. According to the Charter, they gained the right to engage not only in agriculture, but also in trade. However, the free trade had negative consequences for the aliens, involving them into usury, debt bondage, alcoholism, and gambling.

Table 4

Political and cultural autonomy of “nomadic aliens” in the first half of the 19 century
-stabilization of the borders and the internal situation; -development of education and a healthcare system; -formation of intelligentsia; -emergence of the social movement; -ethnic consolidation; -involvement into the market

The authorities did not object to exposing them to education. Moreover, for more successful initiation to Christianity, the Orthodox Church contributed into development of the written language; in case with the Yakuts, it was based on the Cyrillic alphabet. At the time, the government of the Russian Empire managed to build an optimal relationship with the category of “nomadic” aliens of Siberia, which contributed into stabilization of the southern and eastern borders and the internal situation. The status of “nomadic” aliens allowed them to take a certain niche in the complex political, social, class, ethnic and religious system of the empire. To some extent, this status was comparable to the status of the population in western parts of the empire, like the Polish and Finnish people. However, the inherent Charter principles led to the crisis, which affected the entire system of the government relations with the indigenous peoples. Naturally, no model, even the best one, can meet requirements for a long time. Nevertheless, the status of “nomadic” aliens helped to maintain stability for almost a century. Unfortunately, when it was necessary, there were no reformers equal to the authors of the 1822 Charter, who would have been able to further and amend the proposed model with regard to the altered historical conditions.

On the one hand, the status of «nomadic» aliens served as their protection from Russian newcomers and exempted them from such heavy duties as recruitment; on the other hand, over time, it laid the basis for the ethnicity-based discrimination. It was not as pronounced in the 19 century as in the 20 century. There were, however, some cases in the middle of the 19 century when Yakut children were not admitted to upper second-

ary school due to their origin. By the beginning of the 20 century, with the increasing cultural distance between the status of minorities and the status of the general public of the empire under the formation of the civil society in Russia, the situation had changed. The state faced an urgent necessity to revise those articles of the 1822 Charter connected with the rights and duties of the peoples falling under the aliens category.

It would be most fruitful to coordinate the research with colleagues from Abakan, Barnaul, Gorno-Altai, Kyzyl, Tomsk, Ulan-Ude and over academic centers interested in the issue.

In conclusion, I would like to say the following:

- The first half of the 19 century was the most favorable period for the development of the nomadic aliens.
- The political status of the nomadic aliens complied with the social and cultural realities of the time.
- The nomadic aliens occupied their class and ethno-cultural niche in the society.
- The status granted protection from ethnic assimilation, but at the same time, it set a precedent for future discrimination.

Notes

(1) Forest-steppe meadows (Yakut), which reminded them southern steppe areas where their distant ancestors used to live.

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