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# Communist University of Eastern Toilers to Transform the Consciousness of Kazakh Women

*Universidad comunista de trabajadoras del este para transformar la conciencia de las mujeres de kazajas*

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### RESUMEN

La tarea de este artículo es revelar los cambios en el carácter de las mujeres en la era post-soviética, el trabajo considera particularmente el papel de instituciones socialistas prominentes, particularmente la Universidad comunista de trabajadoras del este (KUTV) y sus aspectos socioeconómicos, culturales e influencia política en las mujeres kazajas. Este artículo examina principalmente las actividades de una institución socialista principal, "Universidad comunista de trabajadoras del este" en una categoría específica de personas "mujeres kazajas". El análisis presentado por el autor ofrece a los lectores una comprensión clara de cómo funcionan las universidades y la importancia que tuvo y sigue teniendo para las mujeres kazajas.

**Palabras clave:** Universidad comunista de trabajadoras del este, mujeres kazajas, institución soviética, reforma.

### ABSTRACT

The task of this article is to disclose the changes in character of women in the post-soviet era, the work particularly considers the role of prominent socialist institutions, particularly the Communist university of eastern toilers (KUTV) and its socio-economic, cultural and political influence on Kazakh women. This article principally examines the activities of one main socialist institution, "Communist university of eastern toilers" on a specific category of people "kazakh women". The analysis presented by the author gives readers a clear understanding of how the universities operated and the significance it had and continues to have on kazakh women.

**Keywords:** Communist university of eastern toilers, kazakh women, soviet institution, reform.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the periods of 1920s and 1930s, hundreds of communist students and representatives from different nationalist movements across the world travelled to Moscow for studies. Communist universities were created, funded and controlled by communist parties all over the world alongside other international communist organizations. Graduates from these universities returned to their countries with theoretical and practical knowledge of ideological socialization and social reformation. In describing the phenomenon of social reformation, this article examines the role played by key soviet institution in building gender consciousness and awareness of Kazakh women. In the paper the term "reform" is used in a highly specialized sense, the word acquires the meaning of change in character of something in accordance with the new rules and conditions" (Kuehnast, Nechemia: 2004). Thus, the purpose of this article is to disclose the changes in character of women in the post-soviet era, and to particularly consider practical role played by the famous Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in changing the character of Kazakh women. This work further answers fundamental research questions; what role did prominent socialist institutions, particularly the Communist University of Eastern Toilers play in socio-economic, cultural and political emancipation of Kazakh women? What methods of teaching did the university employ to meet its set goals? What language was used as a tool of acculturation, ideological socialization and social transformation? Did the Communist University of Eastern Toilers create any indelible mark on women's rights in modern day Kazakhstan? Has the mark disappeared without any trace?

After the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917, the Soviet government's goal was to create a "new personality" that understood and supported the new political regime. As a precondition of transformation, they incorporated women at level of influence in families and society (Hosking: 2017). Therefore, the Soviet government tried to spread the progressive ideas of Soviet power in all Islamic regions. The Soviet government clearly understood that if equality of the women of the East is increased, changes in other social structures of the Eastern society will be easily achieved.

In the following section I will highlight a set of problems related to women's rights that called for reform. Unlike Uzbekistan, in Kazakhstan, the Communists could not make a symbol of the supposed oppression of women a veil. The women of Kazakhstan lived a nomadic life and were accustomed to wearing headscarves. This was similar to the practice in other parts of Central Asia that they did not have a habit of covering their faces mainly for rational reasons. As a first step towards women emancipation in the post-soviet revolution era, Kazakh activists started fighting primarily against the payment of bride price and the acceptance of polygamous marriages (Chenoy: 1996). According to them it was humiliating for adolescents to be soiled like goods or exchanged for money and livestock. By paying the bride price "kalym" a woman is reduced to the position of thing being bought. It was further asserted that, this disgusting tradition affected on poor men who were unable to raise the required bride price. In consequence, some men can't afford to get married and build a family of their own. Widespread polygamy also clearly testified lack of women's rights in Central Asia (Pianciola: 2001).ç

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Kazakhstan and foreign historiography, we can single out some studies devoted to the emancipation of women in Central Asia, in particular, Kazakh women in the Soviet period. There are also some studies examining the formation of a new sample of Central Asian women. But, it should be noted that there are no studies that consider educational institutions and, in general, communist education as a tool for changing self-identification or self-awareness of women in Central Asia.

Marianne Kamp (2011) in her work explores the lives of Uzbek women before and after the Russian revolution of 1917. Drawing on her oral histories and writings, Marianna Kamp redefines Soviet Hujum, the

1927 campaign in Soviet Central Asia, encouraging mass public disclosure as a path to social and intellectual "liberation." This fascinating analysis of changes in Uzbek perceptions about women in the early twentieth century reveals the difficulties of unstable times: why some Uzbek women decided to make public, why many were forcibly publicized, why the campaign for making public provoked massive violence against women and how the national memory of this main event remains disputed today.

Sule Erdal (2011) in her dissertation considers that if the policy of the emancipation of women, implemented in Stalinist Central Asia, was built based on Marxist ideology. To this end, after the problem of women's emancipation is conceptualized in classical Marxism, the existing political, economic, sociocultural structures, as well as gender relations in the region before the confrontation between people from Central Asia and Soviet Russians and politics, are Stalin era, exploring in detail the policy of Stalin towards the emancipation of women. Stressing that the problem of the emancipation of women in a socialist society is being sacrificed to the achievement of the great Stalinist ideas, this thesis finally states that, despite the fact that Stalin's policy of emancipating women or Marxism was not directly aimed at women in the end produced both Marxist and liberation consequences in Central Asia.

Grigol Ubiria (2015) this book as a whole is aimed at the study of nationalism and Soviet politics, but still, one paragraph covers the emancipation of Kazakh and Uzbek women. Namely, he considers that the liberation of indigenous women, who the Bolsheviks considered the main victims of Muslim Orthodoxy. For example, such widespread regional Islamic or Islamized practices, such as polygamy, child marriage, kalym (bride's dowry) and levirate, were interpreted by Soviet politicians as the basis for oppressing women in Central Asia. For the Bolsheviks, the "liberation" of Muslim women in the region from their "oppressed" state was seen as a prerequisite for the destruction of the local "backward" social order, which was hostile to the modern, secular, socialist society they planned to build. The Soviet authorities also believed that "the backward peoples of [Central Asia] could not catch up with the advanced peoples of the Soviet Union without involving the masses of emancipated women in [the process] of cultural development and economic growth."

Robert Kindler (2017) work is devoted to the history of Soviet Kazakhstan of the late 1920s - early 1930s. The author considered the policy of the Soviet government in Kazakhstan, the campaign of transferring nomads to sedentary life, collectivization, and in the context of the study, the change in the gender role of women and the way of emancipation are traced and described.

Also, the study was greatly assisted by the work of Kazakhstan researchers Kundakbayeva Zh.B., Beisegulova AK (2015), in a scientific article there is an analysis of the actions of the Soviet government in the formation of the "new Soviet man." Ways of a transformation of family relationships and changes in the social status of women in Kazakhstan. Just as the new model of existence, behavioral strategies, the hierarchy of values, and everyday practices were imposed on Kazakh women.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data used in this study were obtained from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, namely, 532 foundations became the main base of the research. The main data on which we rely in the course of the study are, questionnaires, autobiographies, statements by students of the Communist University of Eastern Workers. Also, thanks to the student performance reports, we can have the opportunity to determine the disciplines studied and compare them with the curricula of men. Also, based on the protocols of the University Commune, we obtained data on the conditions and place of residence of Kazakh women.

## **REFORMATION PROCESS AND GOALS OF REFORM**

In this part of the article we peruse through the main problems and challenges experienced by Kazakh women that called for reformation in rights. One of the first decrees to address the problems of women's equality at the time was passed by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of the People's Commissariat on 18th of December 1917. The decree was clearly enumerated in the register of Civil Marriage and Civil Status (Kembayev: 2012). According to the decree, a man or women could only marry by will and after haven attain the ages of 18 and 16 years respectively. It was also strictly forbidden to marry without consent and before reaching the age maturity. Most importantly, all marriages were to be registered in the marriage and civil status register (Kembayev: 2012).

In the decree of December 28, 1920, adopted in the city of Orenburg, on the abolition of kalym from the Kirghiz, it was noted that, "starting the construction of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic on a new basis, the Kyrgyz Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars consider it necessary to fight against harmful remnants of Kazakh life. These remnants include feces, degrading the honor and dignity of a Kyrgyz woman, and turning her into a slave. Kalym contributes to securing the power of the rich, raising the question of marriage to the dependence of the material" (State Archive of the Russian Federation: 1919-1920). Thus, the Soviet government legally abolishing the marriage traditions of Kazakh society, took the first steps in the formation of a Soviet-style Kazakh woman.

Here it should be noted that the word "Kirghiz" in decrees and decrees of the Soviet power until 1925 we should be understood as "Kazakh", because in the Soviet realities of the 1920s the current Kazakhs were called "Kirghiz", and the modern Kirghiz were "Kara Kirghiz". That is, in 1918-1925, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic is the current Kazakhstan. Only after the delimitation of the territory of Central Asia in 1925, the name of the nation "Kazakh" was restored, and the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic appeared on the USSR's political map.

Kalym - a ransom for the bride, made according to the customs of the Kazakh people by the bridegroom, his parents, relatives and parents of the bride - money or other property. Basically kalym was calculated livestock.

Until the mid-1920s, the image of a new woman was based on the negation of family roles. The family was seen as a hindrance to work. It was believed that a woman plunged into household chores, began to work poorly and was distracted from public life. A woman appeared only in the role of a social activist, a worker and a communist. The dynamic image was painted by a woman involved in an exciting production process and making a daily contribution to communist construction.

«Zhenotdel» was founded in 1918, the purpose of this organization was to involve women in political and party activities. In the Kyrgyz (Kazakh) Regional Committee "Department of Work among Women" was established in 1921 on 15 June. Since 1922, the Women's Department operated in the provinces of Orenburg, Semipalatinsk and Uralsk (Balgozina: 2009)

In the second half of the 1930s. there is a change of discourse. Family and marriage begin to occupy an important place in the hierarchy and among values. Therefore, in the new image, women combine socio-political and family-household statuses, cease to criticize the roles of mother, wife, housewife (Shabatura: 2017).

Involving a woman in social production, the Soviet government solved two problems at once. On the one hand, pragmatic - to ensure the industrialization of the labor force in the face of women. On the other hand, the state wanted to remove the woman from the control of the family and her husband and subordinate the woman to political control from the state.

Also, the reason for the special attention of women was not the shortage of specialists in the field among women with theoretical Marxist-Leninist training; for the advancement of Soviet Ideology. After all, after graduation, they would be a model of the "new Soviet woman" among Kazakh women with a traditional worldview.

## **REFORMATION AGENT; ROLE OF COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN TOILERS**

According to the results obtained as a result of this work, from 1921 to 1938, fifteen Kazakh women were trained at the Communist University of Working People of the East. Of these, seven girls (that is, more than half) began training in 1922. The average age of Kazakh women in KUTV was 21.9 years, and until 1925 the age of incoming Kazakh women was 17 years up to 22 years. And since 1925, age limits ranged from 25 to 37 years. Regarding the overall composition, 46% of Kazakh women sent to KUTV were married, 31% were unmarried (maiden), while 15% were widows and 8% were unknown. All of them were peasants by social origin.

The bulk of the incoming women accounted for 1922-1923 year of study, since in this academic year the rules of prema were very flexible with respect to Eastern women. Among the seven women enrolled in KUTV, Troy were illiterate, the rest noted themselves in the questionnaire as self-taught or graduated from a native school in Kyrgyz (Kazakh).

In subsequent years, such a number of enrolled Kazakh women is not observed; until 1925, only one woman per year showed a desire to get an education in KUTV. From 1925 to 1930 there were no students of Kazakh women. Only in 1931, 3 Kazakh women enter KUTV. But the level of incoming women in the 1930s is fundamentally different, since the already strengthened socialist state went through all the stages of preparation before entering the Communist University.

As previously explained above, in traditional Kazakh society, the first social role of a woman was the role of a mother and housewife (Dave: 2007). And the very fact of the fact that so many Kazakh women responded surprisingly to receiving the highest party education. At first glance, the cause of such activity of Kazakh women may be the result of the activities of women's departments in Kazakhstan. But while studying the materials, we came to the conclusion that, nevertheless, in the motivation for entering the University, Kazakh women had a stereotypical traditional consciousness. For example, students in 1922 enrolled in the ranks of KUTV students only because of their husbands. Pay attention to this clipping application.

"Being sent on account of the distribution of the Kirpish Republic, we, Bergaliyev and Sarpeev, were enrolled as students and members of the KUTV commune; Bergaliyeva Shiyazh and Sarpeyev Fatima don't know the completely Russian language, why they don't have the opportunity to independently exchange without an interpreter, as they were not previously among the Russian population, living among their fellow tribesmen. According to the above, we ask the Board of the Commune to allow us to Bregaliev and Sarpeev fit in the same room with our wives, where we can have the opportunity to teach them Russian, as well as help to study other subjects and ease their situation." (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History: 1922)

But still getting into the new living conditions and the new society, the Kazakh woman went through certain stages of change. First of all, Kazakh women who were sent to study at KUTV were cut off from their roots. They needed to adapt to the unusual European environment. The everyday life of a traditional kazakh woman keeps the house clean and brings up children. With regard to the distribution of economic responsibilities, then in a clear separation of male and female responsibilities in the nomadic economy of the Kazakhs, the main burden of household worries really lay on the shoulders of women. And in the European sense, it looks like discrimination against women. But in the understanding of the Kazakh women themselves, this is a normal practice (Kundakbayeva, Besengulov: 2015).

Traditionally Kazakh auls, this is a settlement of representatives of one kind. Kazakh clan or "Ru" in the Kazakh language is a term denoting belonging to a particular group, the so-called clan. Headed by aksakals. That is, a Kazakh woman was always under the care of her parents, after marriage she was also under the care of her husband's relatives. But on arrival at KUTV, the women were assigned to the hostels according to the internal regulations of the University. According to our identified data, Kazakh students, along with other representatives of Central Asia and Siberia, lived in dormitories. From this it follows that the Kazakh woman, social circle and influence was limited to relatives, begins acquaintance with the women of the Soviet East.

The next not unimportant requirement of KUTV from a Kazakh woman is a change of traditional clothes for University uniform. Thus, the European and Eastern women did not visually have differences, which persisted in the regions. The standard set for female students included a shirt, skirt, shirt, pantalon, robe, stockings, overcoat, boots and boots (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History: 1923).

In the academic year of 1921/1922, Kazakh students were trained in Russian and "Turkic section" languages. The language sections were organized for students who couldn't speak neither Russian nor their native language. The students in the language department were divided into three levels. The first level included the Kroyeans, Hindus, Chinese and other students with secondary education. The second level included students who were working. And to the third level, were peasant student who had endured a low level of preparation. The Turkic section belonged to the third level of students (Megoran: 1999). According to the original plan, the curriculum should have been the same as the main department and included such disciplines: political economy, colonial analysis and the nationalism question, the history of the class struggle in the West, the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia, the theory and practice of the labor movement and the current situation of their countries.

The curriculum for women and men was one. All students, depending on the level of education, took courses in general education and political disciplines. For example, in the preparatory course we studied general education subjects like, geography, physics, chemistry, biology, maematics, mother tongue and Russian. For backward groups on political subjects only "Political Economy" was conducted. The majority of Kazakh students did not speak Russian, and some were not literate in their native language.

All subjects were effectively conducted in Russian, so the students' desire to learn Russian was great. V. Veliykovsky, head of the language section department, states this:

"From the first days of enrollment in U [niversite] t, the student body eagerly began to learn Russian. For the emigrants it was the language of the Russian revolution, for the rest it was the language of a higher culture, for those and others it was an international language in which 52 nationalities of the KUTV could agree on ...From this point of view, it becomes clear why the Russian language according to the principles of U [niversite] is not even obligatory; it takes the first place in the number of hours allocated to it. But instead of the notion that we consider Russian not only as a general educational subject, but also as a political one to a large extent. Life has shown that we were not mistaken. Students, at the beginning, overlaying the grammar in a few months demanded that the lecturers read with him the alphabet "The Alphabet of Communism" (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History. 1921-1922). It was evident that students were not only taught the grammatical parts of the language since after the grammar lecturers teachers where disposed to read and teach the ABC of Communism.

Also, the ideological training of Russian language language teachers was more important than those of professional instructors. The department of linguistics made two key decisions that enhanced the process of transformation. Firstly, the department employed mostly Russian language teachers with communist political that held firm communist deals and political orientation to teach foreign students. secondly, the department search for lecturers who knew all the language rules of grammar but could also explain in a comprehensive manner various topics of communist politics (Dave, B. 2007). Even though theoretical speaking the task of the University was not to transform the Russian language into a political subject, in practical terms the political tool of ideological socialization and social transformation most especially for Kazakh female student at the university.

Most importantly when examining the role of KUTV in the training of women, this article notes that the goal of KUTV was not only to prepare women as members for work within the party cadre, but also the institution had as its primary goal the desire to form a new model of "Soviet women" different from those in from others in the Eastern region. To achieve the said goal the university created a women's department which operated under the slogan, "The women's department is an apparatus that wakes a woman from centuries of sleep, raises its cultural level, with the ultimate goal of involving a woman in common with a man political, cultural, social work" (Kennedy: 2004). At the KUTV's women's department, seminars were

conducted on women's affairs. The lectures were centered on key themes related to gender empowerment, Situation of Women Proletarians and Peasants in Various Fields; condition of female workers in the February and October Revolution; Feminist Discourse and Its Expansion the East; Historical Overview Of Work Among Women; Working Reforms (Fannina: 1938). KUTV Also organized special public events in partnership with governmental, administrative institutions to help advance the goals of the university. Seminar lectures were organized in groups of 4-5 female students with at least one student from Russian origin whose task was to ensure strict follow up and supervision. After a period of time Kazakh female students with the KUTV ascended to a position of prominence, they sought to accede to the party work of the Eastern woman (Dave: 2007). They participated in all women's meetings in Moscow, some within female student cadets went to the extent of writing correspondences in the newspaper under different banners relating to female national consciousness and women's rights. The correspondent also dealt with conditions and problems of women in the different federal political entities within the Soviet Union (Edgar: 2003, 49)

## **CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, this article holds that unless one clearly comprehends the historical dynamic of key soviet institutions that emerged in the aftermath of the October 1917 Socialist Revolution, it will be difficult to systematically understand the historical path of women's emancipation and advancement of gender rights in modern day Kazakhstan. Thus, the this article has succinctly explored the role played by the famous Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in transforming the character of Kazakh women. This work has answered the key research questions outlined in the introductory part of this article. The literature drawn from a range of primary and secondary sources from the university's archives reveals that KUTV played a key role in socio-economic, cultural and political transformation of Kazakh women. A range of methods were employed but the use of Russian language not as only a general educational subject but to a large extent as an instrument of ideological socialization and societal transformation was particularly unique. Drawing from the analysis presented in this article it is possible to arrive to the point that the Communist University of Eastern Toilers created an indelible mark political history and evolution of women's rights in modern day Kazakhstan. A mark that has not disappeared without any traced as its significance is still evident in present day Kazakhstan, the first departments of women's affairs found the provinces of Orenburg, Uralsk and Semipalatinsk is a product of the Kazakh female alumni from the Communist University of Eastern Toilers.

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## **BIODATA**

**Madina AMANDOSOVA:** The author of more than 15 scientific articles. In addition, with the participation of the author, 3 archival documents on the role of Kazakh women of the Soviet period in society were found and put into scientific circulation.

**Yerzhan PAZILOV:** The author of about 30 scientific articles. The author of 3 monographs and study guides. The author led 2 research projects on the history of Central Asia