

Title: The Politics of Education in Kazakhstan – History in Focus

Topic of Research

My research focuses on history education policy in Kazakhstan. In particular, I address the following three distinct but interdependent questions: 1) How and why does a regime that gives strong preference to titular nationals reshape its history curriculum? 2) To what extent do teachers in Kazakh and Russian schools change their pedagogy and approaches to the teaching of history in the face of new program and curricular initiatives? 3) How do the interaction of 1) and 2) affect the likely cultural standing of non-titulars?

Building on the results of my dissertation research, *Schools and History “In Transition” The Case of Kazakhstan* examining policy and instructional changes in the teaching of history, for the IREX Short Term Travel Grant I expand my study of politically relevant education to concentrate on how history education policies at the secondary school level may be creating and fostering processes that lead to ethnic sorting and educational stratification resulting in different approaches to the teaching of history.

Hypothesis of the study:

1. The content of politically relevant education, specifically in the teaching of history, helps explain the characteristics of national development orientation between titular nationals and non-titulars. Ethno-national educational policies that are stronger in Kazakh schools than they are in Russian schools create ethnic stratification and segregation within secondary education propelling the development of two systems of education – one favoring ethnic Kazakhs, and the other serving the minority populations within Kazakhstan. The existence of unequal recruitment tracks inside of Kazakhstan force those excluded to look outside of Kazakhstan for educational and career opportunities.

Research Approach, Methodology and Research Sites

My research focuses on a comparative case examination of three secondary schools in Kazakhstan. I examine history teaching in a Kazakh, Russian and Bi-lingual Kazakh/Russian language of instruction school.

Using data collected between 1998 and 2000 in Kazakhstan, and new interviews with policy officials, teachers and administrators, current educational policy documents and articles, I will present three comparative qualitative case studies that capture the processes of struggle, adaptation and transformation taking place in education within Kazakhstan.

Preliminary Conclusions

Carolyn Kissane
IREX Short-Term Travel Grant Summary Report

Over the course of the last decade the constellation of power in Kazakhstan has shifted dramatically in favor of ethnic Kazakhs. Kazakhs are the valorized nationality in the political, economic and social spheres because of nationalizing policies that exclude minorities from full participation. Minorities in Kazakhstan feel a sense of deterioration of their economic, political and social status and grapple with the complexities that surround the loss of opportunities and access within the republic. The following quote best summarizes the present political situation in Kazakhstan today regarding its swings towards ethno-nationalizing policies.

In addition to drawing on Soviet bureaucratic structures and institutions, the Central Asian states have underpinned their independence by elaborating nationalizing policies and practices that seek to assert the hegemony of their respective titular nations. Despite formulations in the constitutions and other legislative acts guaranteeing the equality of all citizens, nationalizing policies and practices are manifest in, inter alia, the iconography of the new regimes, the privileged status accorded to the local languages, newly revised histories and the exclusion of members of non-eponymous groups from the echelons of power (Smith cited in Tilly et al, 2000).

Kazakhstan, as a poly-ethnic site of transformation provides an important example of a Post-Soviet state attempting to promote secularism while at the same time fostering the space for ethno-nationalization within its public structures. President Nazarbaev has stressed repeatedly that Kazakhstan will be neither eastern nor western, neither Islamic nor Christian; rather the state should be a bridge between both (Olcott, 1997, 557). Kazakhstan's independence has uncovered the crucial fault lines between secular and religious, elites versus the poor, and regional power relations and interests. I analyze the implementation of educational policies and how differences are revealed in the processes of pedagogy and curricular reform.

Based on preliminary findings it is my view that the teaching of history is presented differently in the three schools with Kazakh schools placing more emphasis on the History of Kazakhstan and Russian schools on World History, with more time devoted to teaching about the history of Russia. Russian schools are also more multi-ethnic and offer educational options to non-titular nationals. Though two systems of education appear to be forming, resulting in an inability to retain secularization and increasing the threat of ethno-nationalizing policies in education perpetuating stratification and segregation, minorities are nonetheless choosing alternative educational and career trajectories.

The government of Kazakhstan and its institutions, including the educational variety play a large role in creating a growing level of stratification between titular Kazakhs and the non-titular population. Stratification within educational institutions, employment trajectories and also within cultural spaces is fostered by what Tilly (2002), refers to as "political entrepreneurs who are able to draw together credible stories from available cultural materials, similarly create we-they boundaries, activate both stories and boundaries as a function of current political circumstances, and maneuver to suppress competing models".

Relevance and Contribution to Field

This research is important because the content of politically relevant education may help explain the characteristics of recruitment opportunities and struggles between titular nationals (Kazakhs) and non-titulars (non-Kazakhs: Russians, Germans, Koreans, Uighurs, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, etc). Ethno-national educational policies in Kazakhstan are creating ethnic stratification and segregation within secondary and higher education propelling the development of two systems of education – one favoring ethnic Kazakhs, and the other serving the minority populations within Kazakhstan. The existence of unequal recruitment tracks inside of Kazakhstan force those excluded to look outside of Kazakhstan for educational and career opportunities.

Suggestions for Future Research Agendas

The study and its results carry special resonance beyond Kazakhstan's borders and offers rich data for future comparative studies. Countries faced with similar challenges include but are not limited to: India, Israel, Latvia and Lithuania.

Policy Recommendations

Policy makers in the United States need to be aware of the changing situation in Kazakhstan with regards educational stratification. Kazakhstan, as a poly-ethnic site of transformation and also as an important new player in political and economic development for the region, demands to be more carefully addressed in the way it is moving towards fostering the space for ethno-nationalization within its educational public structures.

This research and its results will offer policy makers and scholars a unique chance to consider the implications of this process as it occurs in a rapidly changing state and the opportunity to address the challenges it poses before a more fixed and divisive tracking system takes hold in the Central Eurasia region.

Selected References:

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