

Mental and psychological roots of Kazakhstan multiculturalism

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Abstract. For the Republic of Kazakhstan the problem of mental orientation is of great significance. This is the cause of quite a reasonable question to be responded with regard to the mental orientation of the Kazakhstani people. What is the right direction of identification – either to the Asia and East or Europe and West? – The answer is that the mentality of the people of Kazakhstan is a way closer to Euro-Asiatic or Eurasian. It should not be confused with the ideas of the pioneering Russian Eurasians like N.Trubetskoy and P.Savitskiy. The point is to absorb all the best features of the Oriental and Western cultures. The location of Kazakhstan is quite unique and favorable for this sort of synthesis as it is situated in the center of the Eurasian mainland.

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Introduction

Sometimes it is quite justly said that there is no need to work out or search for some specific and “particular” way of development. Member of the Kazakh National Academy, Professor A.Nisanbayev makes a point that there is no way to look for something special and unique as the Humankind had already worked out optimal and civilized way of development in the course of a long contradictory and bloody attempts through its history [1]. In effect it means to get the feel and select the optimum of what is possible on the way to the prosperous future compatible with demands of History rather than get back to the traditional nomadic way of life. The question is if the Muslim or Eastern model of Cultural Identity acceptable for present-day Kazakhstan?

One should be careful and cautious responding to this question as in areas of the traditional East (especially in India and China) a personality is eliminated as something fused with family, kin or clan as well the original dimensions like Dao, Brahman or some other abstract value. As for Islam it has some specific features of treatment of nation and citizenship. According to Shari at nation is nothing but Umma with the obvious meaning that people is united with the power of belief in Islam as the powerful factor of integration.

Consequently, the Islamic model of cultural identification is hardly acceptable at least at the current stage of development of the Republic of Kazakhstan as its people were exposed to the variety of religious beliefs diverse from the authentic Islam

and can hardly be subjected to the notion of “Umma”. The transit to Islam was not easy and smooth and the introduced form of it was “Folk Islam” [2]. Besides, the Republic of Kazakhstan is not a religious state, but a temporal state. Abai, followed by Shakarim and some other bright Kazakh men of culture inspired and developed such specific features of the Kazakh mentality like tolerance and polycentrism as well as some other sociocultural orientations.

The main part

Mental identification under multiculturalism. Nowadays some ethnic Kazakhs have a tendency of self-identification with the peoples of the Turkic world and Muslim culture with the idea of joining some super ethnic formation. This approach is the obvious reaction to the challenges out coming from the contemporary globalization. The traditional culture of the Kazakhs should not be the idol as the piece of admiration, but be the back-up in the creation of some new and original samples of culture as the reflection of some phenomena of the human spirit to be integrated into the treasure-house of the mankind.

There are two types of society – traditional and post-modern. The voiced concern is that the traditional one is dying off ousted by the monster culture. But there should be the culture of the third type free of the vague criteria of post-modernism, but based on the true human forms of creativity with the basic principles driven by mutually enriched interacting activity [3].

Traditionally the Kazakh culture was never dependent on a particular culture that was imposed from the outside sources. In this respect we can tell that Kazakhs have been a polycultural or multicultural people as of the early stages of its consolidation. In other words Kazakhs were in the position of easy absorbing the latest achievements of any civilization that was modern and innovative for that particular period in history. According to the expert opinion of some scholars the history of the Kazakhs is the example of being selfstanding on the one hand and being the integral part of some other civilizations with the mutually beneficial effect.

Perceiving that every culture is an integral and self-standing system it is quite natural to suppose that the equation of the two cultures (biculturism) provides for the parity of the players that make up this unity. But the development of the contemporary Kazakh culture has proven that the European component was accepted not on terms of parity and more than that not on the dominating terms. That was the reason of the failure of the Soviet ideologists on imposing the standards of the European culture as something superior and ideal at the expense of the traditional one. The concept “socialist in content and national in form” did not work out as something alien. In biculture with its two-faced character the search of the “center”, integrity and the esthetic point of dominance is always a problem as the redistribution of the priorities is in constant place. This is exactly what predetermines the interactions of the subcultures under biculture in a big way. That is the reason why we should talk on the necessity of dominance of the endogenous component in the biculture structure with the changing world outlook under the flow of the social changes. “This sort of dominance of the endogenous component of biculture with prioritized reflection of the national interest is the obligatory term for the formation of the ethno identity, the ideal to be followed and achieved by any culture on the way of gaining spiritual sovereignty [4].

In Kazakhstan the cooperative dialogue between the traditional cultures and the liberal values is carried out. Republic of Kazakhstan complies with the policy of multiculturalism with the active support of the values and traditions of the Kazakh culture. By saying traditions we mean collectivism, sincerity, benevolence, respect to elderly people, tolerance to the variety of the religious beliefs and etc. At the same time the development of the civil forms of life brings in some opposite values quite different from the traditional ones: individualism, personal liberty, responsibility, initiative and enterprising.

As for the “Multiculturalism” this notion came into being in connection with the necessity to

solve interethnic conflicts emerging in different parts of the world and there has acquired a positive sense. We have got the meaning of “Multiculturalism” as the flourishing variety of the ethnic groups and cultures under the umbrella of a polyethnic society [5].

With the progressing of globalization the voiced concern came out with the negative and critical view at “multiculturalism” as nothing but the intention of the globalists to fade away the national cultures under the cover of the growing variety not of ethnic groups, but individuals. Multiculturalism as something contrary to dictatorship of WAMPs (white American man protestant) was accepted by all the minorities groups. “Multiculturalism” was supported by the antiracist organizations, feminists and left intellectuals. Multiculturalism became the motto of all the forces resistant to be lost and melted in the “pot of the American culture” which is seen as the threat to the individual liberty. Multiculturalism was seen and perceived as another step, to glorious mosaic and the move the capitalism with a human face. It gave way to numerous publications of monographic books to say nothing of magazine and newspapers articles. In the cause of time the tone and attitude towards multiculturalism changed completely as to some clouded judgment that should be eliminated with the idea to regain the true sense of life and moral climate. The well-known researcher of Multiculturalism W.Kymlika comes up with the statement that: “Since the mid-1990s, however, we have seen a backlash and retreat from multiculturalism, and a reassertion of ideas of nation building, common values and identity, and unitary citizenship even a call for the “return of assimilation.” [6].

The scholars with the critical attitude towards multiculturalism come up with the number of arguments and examples of the negative effects of the multicultural strategies. The most striking is the youth mass culture which has become the symbol of multiculturalism for the period of the last three decades. This is the tendency that combines and messes up different cultural forms, languages and styles. The youth mass culture involves into heterogeneous synthesis different and diverse cultural forms far beyond the boundaries of their actual use.

The other powerful tendency which is in many ways similar to multiculturalism is post-modernism. It has been successful for the period of the last two decades in working out the theoretical grounds in acquisition and interpreting the tendencies of cultural synthesis and relativism, formal stylistic flexibility of the conventional cultural forms. Multiculturalism as it is generally viewed can be treated as “plurality of identities” or “polyidentities”

is in itself neutral by its meaning. It can cause the collapse of a personality or make it universal.

In our study we shall use this notion in the second positive meaning. In this regard we share the viewpoint of G.Narbekova, who managed to express the essence of this phenomenon quite clearly and accurately: “Multiculturalism is the interaction, interconnection and mutual enrichment of the national cultures, acknowledgement and enrollment to the spiritual values and norms. It provides for the respect and liberty of self-realization of any ethno cultural subject. The commitment to the cooperative look into some other culture presupposes the presence of the content of some universal human values in the dominating culture” [7].

In Kazakhstan there are some scholars who are quite pessimistic towards the idea of multiculturalism and come off against with some strong arguments. G.Shalabaeva points out: “I do not share the concept of multiculturalism. It is neither original nor innovative. The attempt to install it was taken up in Canada, but it was not a successful, but abortive effort. It was also a complete failure in some places [8]. Going further along the lines of criticism she suggests that multiculturalism should be replaced by some other notion which is “dominating culture”.

In this particular case we believe that the solution of this contrary between the supporters of “multiculturalism” and “dominating culture” lies somewhere in the middle as it is helpful to avoid the extremes. We come up with the neutral notion – dominating tendency in the multicultural society. The ‘spirit’ of this dominating tendency can predetermine the trend and directions of the society and culture. The point is that there are always some dominating factors in this or that region due to the climatic conditions, landscape, natural resources and etc. irrespective of the cultural phenomena in the being of the region.

Modern democracy is not oriented at melting off of the sociocultural groups into some depersonalized “mass society”, it is not focused on the individual or group identity, but the whole society in its multilateral unity. This concept provides for the unity of the human nature in its live variety and concrete reflections. Enjoying the principles of human dignity of peoples of different cultural orientations and beliefs is the lime stone of the modern democratic, pluralistic and legal collective coexistence [9].

Conclusion

As the bridge connecting peoples Kazakhstan brings closer West and East. This link does not reflect the geographical essence of the matter, but traces philosophical, cultural and

historical aspects of the entire package of the exchange of information between the merging continents and peoples. This is exactly the point where the boundary lies between the oriental way of thinking, Russia, China and Central Asia.

It is not by chance that many advanced and independent scholars from different parts of the world speak highly on the integrative capabilities of the present day Kazakhstan and single out some special mission of the Republic in the contemporary world. American philosopher George F.McLean made a confession that: “I have got the feeling that Peace and Culture have settled down in this zone with absorbed numerous traditions rather than in such centers like Beijing and Moscow”. The real experience of the integrative synthesis achieved in Kazakhstan has proved to the rest of the world the actual shape and model of globalization in the form of cooperation, partnership and multilateral dialogue [10].

Findings

Pasqual de la Parte comes with the similar evaluation: “Kazakhstan for us is the bridge between cultures, nations and civilizations. It is the only state in the world with such an exclusive mission as the state with the great potential and prospects. All this makes Kazakhstan a leading light as the source of inspiration provoking a question like – “Why they can and we cannot, Are we that bad?” [11].

By now it has been fixed by many scholars that East and West are not the opposite world-outlooks, but the ones that can supplement one another [12]. The Republic of Kazakhstan should realize this great idea in practical terms since it is based on the idea of the universal unity of the human spirit and history as it was indicated by K.Jaspers in his book: “The Origin and Goal of History” as if he could foresee the processes of the contemporary globalization [13].

Of course Kazakhstan is not the only country, but at the same time it is definitely the obvious and promising one. Culture is a polystructural phenomenon with the variety of mutually beneficial impacts at different structural levels with the most adequate model of interactions as the polyphonic model of cultural cooperation [14].

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