

# Kazakhstani Humanism: Challenges and Prospects

Samat Turganbekov, and Zhakan Mol

**Abstract**—This article examines the emergence and development of the Kazakhstan species of humanism. The biggest challenge for Kazakhstan in terms of humanism is connected with advocating human values in parallel to promoting national interests; preserving the continuity of traditions in various spheres of life, business and culture. This should be a common goal for the entire society, the main direction for a national intelligence, and a platform for the state policy. An idea worth considering is a formation of national humanist tradition model; the challenges are adapting people to live in the context of new industrial and innovative economic conditions, keeping the balance during intensive economic development of the country, and ensuring social harmony in the society.

**Keywords**—Kazakh humanism, humanist tradition, national culture, spiritual and moral priority, national interest.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**F**ORMATION of Kazakhstani humanism means a new stage in the country development, a stage of renewal and determination of its development direction; a tendency to join reforming of spiritual and humanistic traditions, as well as support of people's customs and the way of life; identification of details and responsibilities that increase the society's capacity and advocacy of social power of the masses; serving the formation of national identity "without doing any harm" (Hippocrates). This includes the national objectives, civic duty and national interests.

The availability of a systematic infrastructural basis and an influential social environment is vital for a sustainable development of Kazakhstan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The principle of systematisation is defined in Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's "Kazakhstan-2030" and "Kazakhstan-2050" long-term strategies [1]; the social environment is in the history of the Kazakh people, whereas the systematic basis is in natural resources of Kazakhstan, its social and political stability and its spiritual image. Kazakhstan keeps to positive cultural and political trends of democratic and republican states in the world, developing such trends within its own borders. By the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of its independence, Kazakhstan has successfully reached a significant milestone in being ranked 51<sup>st</sup> in the global

economic competitiveness rating. International experts give a unanimous positive assessment of the Republic of Kazakhstan's numerous achievements. Increase in the state's authority, growth of its economic capacity and spiritual enrichment of the nation form a new environment. In the context of rapid modernization, Kazakhstan retains its unique image and position, becoming a country known throughout the world.

The biggest challenge for Kazakhstan in terms of humanism is connected with advocating human values in parallel to promoting national interests; preserving the continuity of traditions in various spheres of life, business and culture. This should be a common goal for the entire society, the main direction for a national intelligence, and a platform for the state policy. An idea worth considering is a formation of national humanist tradition model; the challenges are adapting people to live in the context of new industrial and innovative economic conditions, keeping the balance during intensive economic development of the country, and ensuring social harmony in the society.

The indomitable pursuit of knowledge in the spirit of humanism and aspirations for human integrity are keystones of the humanist tradition. Increasing humanness in people, treating humanity as a source of civic and professional development is the need of society, the basis of cooperation, and ambitions of our generation. Comprehensive studies of various national humanism models, selection of the best humanist practices are the pressing challenges for the social and philosophic analysis.

Humanistic traditions of the nation will remain vital provided the continuity of the following tripod: getting in harmony with the nature, development of an open society, and promotion of people's freedom. Continuity of humanism is the rule of man's existence. The nations' humanism will only develop when the thoughts and the behaviour of people are directed towards serving common civic interests, and when the mutual integration of regional civilization and cultural diversities reaches the highest level. When the nation outlines its integral and solid cultural way, it shapes its unique model of humanism. The better understanding of the nation's humanism and its uniqueness comes with the development of the historical attitude towards the humankind, as well as with the analysis of ethnic groups and regional cultures from the global point of view. Uniqueness is the synthesis of uniformity and harmony.

*"Who we are, where are we going and where would we like to be?"* These are yet to be determined by the Kazakhstan

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citizens at the current stage of the consolidation of country's independence. Having genuine interest in forming a new social model and adhering to its new principles are becoming the necessary conditions.

Developing its image as a bridge between the East and the West, Kazakhstan is now successfully combining models of both civilizations adjusting their features to its own development. This, being a model of harmony and continuity, is the main prerequisite for success of the country.

Sustainability of the national traditions lies in the unity of the nation's culture and language. Oriental traditions, firstly, are peculiar in that for a continuous period of time in the past they reproduced available economic, social, political and ideological relations on the level of internal traditions; secondly, the type of the person and his way of life is closely connected with and dependent on the social group he is associated with; thirdly, worldview and perception of the person in various societies can be characterized by his inseparability from the surrounding nature, as well as his own physical nature; fourthly, the worldview of a man is determined by mythological and religious system of relations.

Direct transfer of progress vector and its local European terms and definitions to the history of other regions is more than insufficient and may put on a false track. 'The theory of history must be developed fatherly by improving historiosophic tools not only on global but also regional scales'. Historiosophic tools do not exclude the coexistence of alternative models for the cultural development; they leave open the possibility for freedom in choosing the model and do not preclude the presence of its predictive abilities [2].

What historical lesson should be learnt from this? It is critical not to lose clear-cut positions in relation to challenges of international and domestic development; to generalize the sources of viable trends in Kazakhstan's reality; to focus on promoting social and humanist thinking; to show willingness to compromise and eradicate elements of the extremism. These positive steps are ultimately directed to innovative and integrative trends of development. They enable us to integrate into the global world and find our own place in it.

The state policy of Kazakhstan takes into consideration and is guided by both distinctive features of Kazakhstan's civilization and the global outlook. Scientist from Kazakhstan, M.S. Orynbekov, gave his fair judgment, 'The Kazakhstani civilization seeks to combine the strongest points of both the Western and the Eastern outlook, i.e. to combine politics and ethics, rationalism and humanism, the Western 'technology' and the Eastern 'morale', the science, technology and oriental values, personal and public, stability and development, etc.' [3, 252 p.].

At the same time, '...it may seem that the logics, globalization and the national model are incompatible concepts. They all are rooted in different sources; possess different interests, traditions and trends. Today, it is necessary to transform the perception of the world into an opportunity of overcoming the global outlook crisis, of corresponding to the reality which is encountered by a man and which motivates his activities; of establishing a coexistence of diverse attitudes

which have more common things rather than controversies; of realizing the multi-vector movement of civilization trends, multi-variance of the political and cultural development of the society. Recognition of the variety of traditions within the system and approval of coordinates, on the one hand, extend horizons for mutual understanding of the parties and convergence of their interests, on the other, it increases the rationalization of man's attitude towards nature and society proportionally to general rules of game and international standards' [4]. This political subtlety has been timely considered by the country which, in turn, ensured the 'Kazakhstan's Path' within the framework of the multi-vector development.

Humanistic renewal of Kazakhstan can be divided into four stages. 1) Historically, the humanist traditions of the Kazakh nation are comprised of ancient traditions and customs. 2) In the period between 18th - 20th cc, humanistic tradition of the nation were unilaterally influenced by the policy of Russia and lately, by the Communist Party ideology; national features of the humanism have been weakened from inwards. 3) In the period between 1990-2015, Kazakhstan, being an independent country, experienced a dynamic development of the national culture and interethnic relations. 4) The fourth period covers the time frame between 2015-2050. The contribution of the Kazakh nation to the strategic development of the country will only increase in the future; the nation will have wider responsibilities as well. The status of 'the Kazakh statehood' is expected to be returned in the coming years. Therefore, the history and the cultural essence of the Kazakh nation located in the Eurasian space cannot be described or evaluated by the single criterion. The European interest towards the nomadic civilization is built on certain in-depth motivations, "which include fascination, fear, and even phantasmagoria to some extent: getting mixed, they build up a package of intellectual curiosity which includes religious, political and military intentions.... Adherence of Central Asian nations to shamanism and juxtaposition with monotheism aroused the special interest of the Europeans. Moreover, deep religious tolerance possessed by these nations has already enraptured Rubruk back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and John Bell in the 18<sup>th</sup> century [5].

The East and the West have influenced the formation of the Kazakh nation in their own peculiar manner, differently at each period of time. Life experiences and human values could not shape their courses at once due to fluctuating social movements. Nonetheless, some fundamental concepts have been formed in earlier stages stating that the key and the lever for success was the social power of masses, whereas the basis of social power was the unity, concord and fair service to the country. Showing a reverence for history and destination of the nation, it is worth reflecting upon certain stages of its past.

In the ancient times up to the formation of the Kazakh statehood (15 c.), the Kazakhs and the entire Central Asian people maintained close relations forming a life space which extended up to 2.5 mln. square kilometres. In the course of different historical periods and stages, the Central Asia has served as a catalyst space connecting different cultures.

Cultural integration developed in various natures of identity in different periods; epoch-making moments of cultural integration occurred showing its prevalence over integration of political, economic and everyday traditions. The first signs of the cultural integration firstly emerged in wide steppes by the indigenous population possessing a free life-style, secondly, the cultural integration was nurtured by the interrelation of Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Islamic traditions and religions, which met various support in each region. Thirdly, 'The Great Silk Road' with its history over one and a half century had a considerable impact on cultural integration of the Kazakhs, facilitating both of the self-actualization and the interaction with other cultures. The fourth is the Islam religion and the Islamic culture which had a profound effect of facilitating the close cooperation of Central Asian and Kazakhstan people, and adjusting their customs and traditions. Recognition of the interethnic concord as a high value demonstrates that it has become the necessary condition in the context of the nomadic way of life. The stage of the Renewal of the arts in the period between 9-13<sup>th</sup> cc. on the territory of the Central Asia and the modern-day Kazakhstan shows that the tolerance and humane qualities were highly valued. This process has reached its peak here earlier than it did in the West.

The religion (particularly, Zoroastrianism and Islam) has played an important role in the Kazakh history and culture making a great contribution to forming common traditions, customs and the ideology of accord between the indigenous population and the local people. Islam developed the *ideology of spiritual movement* and *brought the spiritual development into accordance with humanistic traditions*. Most importantly, it has promoted the tradition of worshipping the spiritual, respecting the human spirit, and finding a high sense of accomplishment in the spiritual power, i.e. choosing humanness as a life value, consolidating the tradition of purity, transparency and justice in human relations. This position has now turned into the advanced traditions of the nation. The best minds of the nation have systematized the substantiation of *sensibility, prudence and a good faith*. These substantiated traditions ensured the morality of preaching about serving Allah and the mankind. Fulfilling the acts of worship would mean the salvation from spiritual poverty. Adhering to the morality would ensure the direct path of coming close to God. Traditions of the harmony and concordance went far beyond the aforesaid.

The Sufism, this special doctrine of Islam and the national culture of Kazakhstan, has gained momentum in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. In his works, Akhmed Yassaui pointed out that the good conscience, wise thoughts and honorable deeds lift up the status of a man. Apart from Islam, the humanitarian studies and the literature have also become the generators of the spiritual power of society. The folk literature has shaped the humanist model and image of the Kazakh people. Although the indigenous population led the nomadic way of life, they demonstrated their courage fighting for justice and well-being without being discouraged in difficult times. This required a great sense of bravery, the courage of spirit and the ability to tell the truth in a fearless manner.

The Islam religion and nomadic humanist traditions promoted the role of ethics and the status of a man. The reputation of mankind was bolstered by its willingness to experience, cognize and learn the secrets and shades of nature. The mankind strived to find the ways to subjugate the environment. The purity and harmony, intrinsic intuition and masterly skills were considered in the medieval times as human values. Those who adhered to encouraging the sense of courage and honor highly appraised the importance of mutual help. This was the community and the environment which fostered the upbringing of kind-hearted, intelligent and noble citizens. This exemplary tradition has never lacked its willingness to adhere to a spiritual power and retained its motivation to become the cure for heart and soul. Arising out of the spiritual need, the unity has become a milestone power and an endless dream. 'These dreams are formed in correspondence to the inner world of a man possessing a good conscience, a deep insight, wise and prudent thoughts, and sensibility. Moreover, the dreams also develop in accordance with the knowledge of the man, his cultural development and goals' [6].

The arrival of the Arabic and Islamic culture in Central Asia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the convergence of local traditions with the new movement; spontaneous interaction of traditions developed in a new manner. Political and social processes boosted the emergence of sagacious and intelligent minds. One of the prominent figures in the history of the nation was Abu Nasr Al-Farabi (870-950). A number of Kazakhstan's scholars provided comprehensive proofs that the works of Al-Farabi not only synthesized the heritage of antiquity but gave them a new shape. Al-Farabi has grown up in a social and cultural environment combining features of Turkic, Islamic and Eastern civilizations; he derived his inspiration from diverse cultures; his ideas have drawn together many different traditions. Al-Farabi has promoted a fundamental view that a man should direct his personal development towards the benefits for his life, his community and should perform honourable deeds. Self-development in this manner would bring people together in pursuits of the truth and knowledge. Qualities as the honour, self-confidence, willpower and wisdom would contribute to regulating social interrelations. In his life, Al-Farabi remained the vehement advocate of human qualities such as honesty, benevolence, affability, humanness, and firmness. He believed the humanity was the only way and the model for wisdom, and stayed an upholder of this view [7]. This has become the essence of the Eastern humanism.

It is not a historical accident that Al-Farabi was born and grew up during the period of Central Asian Renaissance. The Renaissance in Central Asia (9-13cc.) developed in parallel to the growth of the Arabic culture (8-13 cc.) and the renewal of humanism in China (8-19 cc.). This time coincidence is mainly related to the development of the Great Silk Road which has become the network of cultural exchange between the West and the East. Although the trade was the major function of the Great Silk Road, it has significantly contributed to the consolidation and development of the

civilization in cities located along its Eurasian routes including Otyrar, Turkistan and Taraz cities. Being the driving force of the society, the greatest thinkers of the nation have developed features of Arabic, Turkic and Persian cultures in an Islamic manner; they systemized these cultures in the manner of spiritual succession. The poets, the writers and philosophers perceived the social and religious content of local traditions in their general sense and used them for their common goals. The essence and peculiarities of the Central Asian Renaissance lie in these endeavors.

It is a common knowledge that the history of culture has witnessed different models of humanism. Key moments in the development of each culture were determined by the processes of humanism. If the European Renaissance was based on anthropocentrism, the Kazakhstani humanism is based on the concept that '...generally, it is multiculturalism which enables us to determine and specify the peculiarities of cultural and national identity, to leave open the possibility of pluralism in cultural spaces' [8].

Under the Russian Empire, the Kazakh people have suffered discrimination on a racial and national ground; the sense of national pride was trampled down; the Kazakhs were oppressed in their own land against their fundamental rights to live and to work. Immorality became widely spread in the Kazakh land in its different forms including avidity, greed, treachery and betrayal. Due to discrimination, the Kazakhs were deprived of their indigenous trade of occupation, their roots, their native language and their national spirit. They were treated as inferiors in their own land. Losing its national identity, the native population has turned into a massive crowd of people with no sense of national pride.

Political and social disparities in the Kazakh society became obvious during the Soviet Union. Leaders of The Alash Party, the advocates of the national movement, were prosecuted and repressed for their views. Intellectuals and forward-thinkers were dispersed by oppression and exile. The nation has lost its best minds. Due to the lopsided ideological pressure, the Kazakhs were prohibited to use their native language and were forced to deny their national traditions and customs. The Kazakhs were constrained to refrain from their national culture and spirit. The ideology of the Communist party has weakened the positions of the Kazakh language and separated it from its spiritual roots and national essence. The Kazakhs started losing their national consciousness; the national heritage failed to be treated with due care and respect and eventually was consigned to oblivion. The idea of the class struggle was put above the national interests. Being oppressed and intimidated, the Kazakhs failed to develop the spiritual wealth and humanist traditions within their daily activities and customs; this, in turn, resulted in their split and disintegration; the national tolerance and persistence were lost. Having a limited awareness of the nation's history, the new generation has become devoid of the historical conscience and lost the connection with their historical background. Some of them ignored and neglected their national traditions and customs cringing before the Russian administration. They became the victims of false slogans and promises. The social

disintegration crippled the integrity of the nation and enforced people into espousing the indifferent state of mind. Having lost its value, the humanism has become the slogan of amateurs. National humanist models were trampled.

The anchorage of humanist traditions is the sovereignty of the nation, consolidation of the national consciousness and improvement of interethnic and interreligious relations. *Humanist traditions, spiritual factors and the culture of interethnic relations* have considerably influenced Kazakhstan in choosing its own way of modernization and development. These three factors have been developed in different historical periods. Today, their correlation serves to ensure the political stabilization and moral integrity of the society.

**Gaining its sovereignty, the Kazakh nation has developed into a fully legitimate republic. As an independent country, Kazakhstan has successfully practiced the peaceful coexistence of various cultures and religions demonstrating a strong willingness and respect towards the dialogue of cultures and civilizations. Kazakhstan is now conducting a wide-scale modernization of social institutions. The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan is functioning as the largest social institute; The Congress of the World and Traditional Religions has been hosted by the country for four times (2003, 2006, 2009, and 2012); the Turkic Academy has been opened recently. The fundamental aims and tasks of these social institutions are to promote the interethnic accord, peace and concordance; to ensure the harmony between religions and the society, culture and the government, i.e. to develop humanist traditions in a comprehensive and continuing manner.**

Failures to understand the new role of a man, conflicts within various groups are obstructing the renewal of humanism in the new environment. Global processes are often misunderstood or interpreted so as to gain profit from them. The competitiveness is declining in the context of the policy which seeks only the material wealth and power, and the society which seeks personal gain from the technical frivolity. The life has now become a big turmoil. The rapid development of technology has speeded the pace of life. Appearances of human achievements capable of amazing us are gradually becoming less and less frequent. People are losing their sense of compassion, mercy and kindness; whereas violence and cruelty are gaining momentum. Human qualities have become the objects of barter and merchandise. People rarely show kindness and care of each other. Failure to find kindness in a family leads to the rifts within relations between the elder and the younger generation.

The society needs substantive preparations to clear up misunderstandings and de-escalate conflicts. This requires us to create a *multi-level* system to counteract such crises. The multi-level system covers the professional knowledge and communication abilities of a person, development of the criterion assessment and critical thinking, improvement of the education, as well as morale building and self-development activities. The more these efforts define the nature of humanist traditions, the more likely they are to become the prerequisites of a man's happiness and compassion. The national culture is

highly valued for it incorporates the sense of cordiality and kind-heartedness into its humanist traditions. The latest trends demonstrate that Kazakhstan is entering into a global space in a fast and confident manner. New initiatives of the country do not ignore human values; on the contrary, human values are attached the highest importance. The state offers all the necessary conditions for the development and sustainability of these values. Main human values such as peace, accord, multiculturalism, and ethnic and religious diversity are developing into a huge power of society.

It is apparent that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, separate nations are playing an important role in bringing the world together, as well as in identifying and developing it; national movements are becoming the main driving forces of the society. It is no wonder that nationalism is being developed as an advocate of social initiatives. The imperial policy has developed a negative sense of the concept of 'nationalism'. National interests were trampled down by exacerbation of class struggle and class principles. The scale of nationalistic views towards the Kazakh nation is escalating with the increase of Kazakhstan's influential role in the world arena. Nationalistic feelings of the Kazakh people are based on their sense of patriotism, endless love of their homeland, their insight and judgement, as well as on their firm belief in the brighter future. This is primarily a new concept based on humanitarianism and social conscience; secondly, this is a systematic principle designed to retain the identity and image of the Kazakhs as an indigenous nation forming the state; in the third place, this is a strive to eradicate the influence of former dominating rules. The new concept of 'nationalism' is emerging due to the escalation of national factors and the renewal of the social conscience. Kazakhstan, which declared its independence a short time ago, highly values and applauds a sense of nationalism as a tool for changing a social attitude and developing a new way of thinking. Today, the information society is clearly demonstrating that the dignity of the person, his civic consciousness will fail to harmonize with the national identity unless we develop the sense of national pride, national character and national interests within the framework of the government and culture. It is becoming evident that the society should not counterfeit, misrepresent and ignore human and national values. **The national interest is the development of a humanistic system designed to meet these goals.** Each individual should strive to serve this national interest.

Today, the society needs a modernized and more effective social policy applicable to all times. The most important lesson learnt in the struggle for independence is that one should protect the interests of his country and his nation to the best, **treat national interests with due care and respect; and demonstrate his strengths and skills in action.** In this respect, we should take steps to ensure the renewal of the three following concepts: Self-activity – the development of socialization and self-realization, this is additionally similar to the renewal of humanism. Coordination of the right ideas in a proper order also develops *the thinking skills and thinking methods*, as well as the ways *to integrate* them.

Distinctiveness – the direct way for credence. Credence – a system specifically built on certain individual ideas, the guarantee of the inner cohesion of the person.

The ultimate condition for our existence as a state, a society, and a nation is maintenance of social harmony and reinforcement of national security. It is the responsibility of the government and society to offer all the necessary conditions for citizens to realize their business potentials; **to facilitate the implementation of long-term development strategies to ensure the social stability**; to show support to progressive international initiatives and contribute to the global security. *A genetic blueprint of the nation is a civil peace and interethnic accord, the advocacy of the diversity of national cultures and humanist traditions.*

## II. CONCLUSION

**The accord of government and civic goals in major social matters** is vital in developing the future of the Kazakhstani humanism. The humanist renewal means serving the benefit of the country, taking responsibility for the destiny of the homeland, forming a new national conscience and taking cooperative actions. These are the solid grounds for social stability and unity. Unity, collaboration, tolerance and prudence are extremely important for the nation. Kazakhstan can move forward only uniting and strengthening the social power of the nation. For this purpose, the country should promote *its own understanding of patriotism* and develop the integrity of the nation within a multicultural society. This step is highlighted in "Kazakhstan-2050" long-term strategy of the country as the main prerequisite for the country to exist as a state, society and nation. **Each individual must fulfil the conditions of humanist tradition in an independent, confident and efficient manner. This is the value and meaning of humanism.**

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