

**G. Dadabayeva**KIMEP University, Kazakhstan, Almaty  
e-mail: dgulnara@kimep.kz**SOVIET HISTORICAL GENRE:  
A BRIDGE BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT**

A focus of the present paper is a comparison of the nation-state building processes in modern Russia and Kazakhstan where we are using such tool as historical genre in literature. The paradox of the modern nation-state construction is usage of the approaches that were created in 1960-70s. Here we can highlight the most intriguing puzzle of the moves in western social sciences and Soviet historical genre as fiction. Same years 1960-70s had witnessed the emergence of western post-modernist history with its abnegation of previous history written by academics. In broad context we can say that new Soviet historical genre was similar abnegation of previous Stalin's period official history with its exaggerated role of the personality in history (inspired by Joseph Stalin), colonialism problems and anti-colonial struggle along with fabulous research done over state history in former Russian empire and Soviet Union. Thus, the focus of the history had shifted from the previous acute problems to such questions as models of transformation from "imperial" to nation-state (Kappeler 2001), constructions that were used as "mobilizing instruments" (Suny 2001) and periods of Soviet history which we can underline to differentiate culture of center and periphery elite in context of their reflections on nature of nation and state (Motyl 1997).

**Key words:** nation, historical genre, statehood, socialist realism, postmodernism.

Г. Дадабаева

КИМЭП университеті, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.  
e-mail:dgulnara@kimep.kz**Кеңестік тарихи жанр:  
өткен мен болашақ арасындағы көпір**

Бұл мақала кеңестік кезең әдебиетінің тарихи жанрында көрініс тапқан Қазақстан мен Ресейдегі ұлттық-мемлекеттік құрылыс мәселелеріне арналған. Посткеңестік мемлекеттердегі ұлттық-құрылыс, негізінен, 1960-1970 жылдары қабылданған тәсілдерді қолданатын. Осы кезеңдегі кеңестік тарихи жанр шарықтай отырып, кеңес жазушыларына тарихи үдерістер түйісінде алдыңғы ресми тарихты жоққа шығаратын пост-модернизм тәжірибесінде қабылданған тәсілдерді қолдануға мүмкіндік берді деуге болады. Осылайша, жаңа тарихи әдебиеттер сталиндік кезеңнің ресми түсіндірмелерімен күресті бастады, мәселен, жеке тұлғаның тарихтағы асыра бағалау рөлі, отаршылдық және отаршылдыққа қарсы күрес мәселелерімен қатар Ресей империясы мен Кеңес Одағына арналған Мемлекет тарихы туралы керемет еңбектерді де қамтиды. Сонымен тарихи әдебиеттің бұрынғы түсіндірулері «империядан» «ұлттық мемлекет» (Каппелер 2001) бұрынғы тұжырымдарынан трансформация моделін қалыптастыруға, жұмылдыру ретінде қолданылатын конструкцияларға (Suny 2001) және кеңес тарихының мәдениетін нақты бөлетін кезеңдерге ауысады, ұлттар мен мемлекеттер (Motyl 1997) табиғаты туралы ойлар түйісінде мәдениеттің орталығы мен перифериясын анық ажырататын кеңес тарихы кезеңінен алшақтайды.

**Түйін сөздер:** ұлт, тарихи жанр, мемлекеттілік, постмодернизм.

Г. Дадабаева

Университет КИМЭП, Қазақстан, г. Алматы  
e-mail:dgulnara@kimep.kz**Советский исторический жанр: мост  
между прошлым и будущим**

Данная статья посвящена проблемам национально-государственного строительства в Казахстане и России, отраженного в историческом жанре литературы советского периода. Парадокс нациестроительства в постсоветских государствах заключается в том, что в основном применяются подходы, принятые еще в 1960-70-е годы. В контексте исторических процессов этого периода можно сказать, что советский исторический жанр переживает взлет в тот период,

когда западные постмодернистские теории с их отрицанием предшествующей официальной истории дали возможность советским писателям использовать подходы, принятые в практике постмодернизма с их отрицанием предшествующей официальной истории. Таким образом, новая историческая литература начала борьбу с официальными трактовками сталинского периода, такими, как, например, преувеличенная роль личности в истории, проблемы колониализма и антиколониальной борьбы, наряду с замечательными работами по истории государства, посвященными Российской империи и Советскому Союзу. Таким образом, фокус исторической литературы уходит от прежних трактовок к формированию модели трансформации от «империи» к «нации-государству», конструктам, используемым как мобилизационные, и к тем периодам советской истории, которые четко разделяют культуру центра и периферии в контексте их размышлений о природе нации и государства.

**Ключевые слова:** нация, исторический жанр, государственность, социалистический реализм, постмодернизм.

## Introduction

A world today seems to be attracted more and more with the idea of strong nation-state in spite of the widely declared victory of the “global village”. Post-Soviet space with its mature nationalist sentiments looks as one of the best illustrations of the diversity of nation-state building strategies. However, the case of the Russian Federation should be analyzed from perspectives significantly different from the other post-Soviet national republics. For instance, opposite to Central Asian republics which were the last to agree with the disintegration of the Soviet Union Russian leader Yeltsin called for a gaining real sovereignty and freedom meant separation from the other republics. However, in spite of the hardships lasted over quarter century the nation-state building processes in CA republics still are positioned as more loyal to Russian politics states in comparison with the more “pro-western” oriented post-Soviet republics.

In order to evaluate Kazakhstan and Russian relations at present from various angles we need to return back to the most acute moments of “Soviet imperial past”. The focus should be switched to the role that Soviet historical novel played in further process of constructing sovereign nation-states after USSR fall in 1991. In 1960-70s the Soviet population went through a “boom” of the interest to national histories. Paraphrasing Suny’s statement that “historical interpretation shapes the development of nationalism today and in the future” (Suny 1993: XI) we can suppose that Soviet historical genre “shaped” the trajectories of the future post-Soviet states. Opposite to rising nationalism aspirations in most local literatures the search of some Russian writers reflected ways of transformation from “empire of nations” to a Russian nation-state. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is still underestimated by native scholars (Kruglov 2014). As Suny (Suny 1993: XI) pointed out “blinkered by shared intellectual inheritance of

the Enlightenment and materialism, Marxists and liberals alike fail to appreciate the profound political impact of nationalism”.

Thus, the focus of the present paper is a comparison of the nation-state building processes in modern Russia and Kazakhstan where we are using such tool as historical genre in literature. The paradox of the modern nation-state construction is usage of the approaches that were created in 1960-70s. Here we can highlight the most intriguing puzzle of the moves in western social sciences and Soviet historical genre as a fiction. Same years 1960-70s had witnessed the emergence of western post-modernist history with its abnegation of the previous history written by academics. In broad context one might suggest that new Soviet historical genre was similar abnegation of the official history written in previous Stalin’s period with its exaggerated role of the personality in history (inspired by Joseph Stalin), colonialism problems and anti-colonial struggle along with fabulous research done over state history in former Russian empire and Soviet Union. Thus, the focus of the history had shifted from the previous acute problems to such questions as models of transformation from “empire” to nation-state (Kappeler 2004), constructions that were used as “mobilizing instruments” (Suny 2001) and periods of Soviet history which we can underline to differentiate culture of center and periphery elite in context of their reflections on nature of nation and state (Motyl 1997).

So, the range of the discussed problems in general was defined by shift from 1) the *vertical* post-colonial discourse (local versus Russia) with particular stress to the national history issues and 2) by horizontal reverse from “Marxism” vision of the history to pagan concept “seeing the world as eternal cosmos, revolving in periodic cycles” (Banerjee and Carrell 1988:32). The latter means that eternal world around is impossible. Certain periods in history end with social, political and military explosions that accompanied usually the disappearance

of civilizations and states once dominated in ancient and medieval worlds.

***Soviet historical genre as postmodernism phenomenon (theoretical issues)***

From the perspectives of western postmodernism theory the mankind is trapped by *nihilism* because human history has no ultimate goal. Bolsheviks' idea of "socialist just society" was the last attempt to solve this dilemma when the Soviet state constructed "ideal communist society" to become a reality in far – remote future. More exiting part of the trends that had appeared in Soviet historical genre in 1960-70s was an appeal exactly to "postmodernist view" that history is what we make of it. Not surprisingly we can notice the first sprouts of historical pagan concept in historical fiction. This genre had been experienced more freedom in late Soviet time to reflect boldly over "imagined history". But the paradox of the late Soviet historical fiction was based on strange combination of "postmodernist" views with primordial reflections why certain states and nations came into being and what ideas led personalities whom we traditionally call fathers-founders of states.

Western scholarship has noticed a paradoxical move within the fundamental trends of modern Russian literature also affecting the national republics fictions. From the middle 1990s postmodernism has been influential denominator of literary genre (Epstein 1999). While general western understanding of postmodernism is connected with "distrust towards grand narratives, ideologies and various tenets of Enlightenment rationality" (Duignan Britannica) "social realism" opposite constructed "a hyperreality which is neither truthful nor false but is comprised of the ideas which become a reality for millions of the people" (Epstein 1999:155). However, this ambivalent phenomenon can be identified as postmodernism trend due to their implacable denial of the pre-revolutionary culture and literary traditions of the Russian empire. This statement is quite conformant with western postmodernism' vision of reality that associates with skepticism towards modernist traditions.

Epstein argues that as the "socialist realism" affected literature of the Soviet time so did postmodernism when it has been defining present day tendencies in Russian literature while both theories are deeply rooted in Russian cultural tradition. Postmodernism in Russia is not only a reaction to western movement but it is also a phenomenon born on the native Russian ground. Epstein's vision of the postmodernism as "production of reality" by means

of producing "plausible copies (Epstein, 1999) strangely enough is leading to a main question covering fundamental issues of modern nation-state: how these "plausible copies" of reality have been transformed into "real realities" or as Epstein points out "models of reality replace reality itself" (Epstein 1999). Epstein focused on literary genre as whole while historical that was one of the most influential in 1970-80s was left without attention. He supposed that Russian postmodernists, namely conceptualists were able to escape the tenets of "socialist realism" as well as romantic vision of reality and it became the main reason of turning to *the only reality of the country – ideas*. The new mainstream of Soviet literature has used different tools mainly pastiche to create their own realities. And here we should agree with Epstein conclusion that Soviet postmodernism appeared separately from the western ones.

It had its own agenda: Soviet literature had to struggle with such enemies as legacy of tsarist culture including literary genre while pre-war (WWI) modernism was not seen so alien for the western societies. Though we can see similarities between sharp critics of the modernism in Soviet and western culture they differ by sources which inspired transition from modernism to postmodernism. And in general these processes were defined by society's attitude to the reality. While Soviet Union intelligentsia was led by hatred, split and abnegation of the past western culture went through evolutionary path that still kept some space for these outmoded modernism culture. Irony, sarcasm paradoxically alleviated the process of postmodernism emergence. Opposite Soviet postmodernism was trapped by needs to destroy its own predecessors and consequently this struggle dictated to keep serious attitude to its pre-revolutionary counterpart. The grand goal of construction of 'revolutionary state' was realized by means of terror, deaths, blood, tears and compared only with the period of Great French Revolution XVIII century enormous enthusiasm that became the ground for the heroic literature. This literature cannot be sarcastic or ironical to its own heroes; this fiction had to be respectful to comply with "grand project".

***Why history? Soviet social science in context of western postmodernism***

The fundamental challenges of the Soviet Union construction also led to the transformation of social sciences role in society. Since 1920-s humanities had been slowly moving to unusual functions; they tried to create logic vision of the reality embedded into the context of Soviet reality.

Unfortunately, this ambivalent reality forced academics to think within the white-black dichotomy approaches and social sciences lost their potential to research “a real reality” replaced by “plausible copies” of the reality.

Of course, the Soviet power’s limitation of the themes opened for the research by scholars was a nightmare for the further maturation of the history as science. However, it didn’t affect history as negatively as impossibility to go in congruence with the western scholarship. Divarication inaugurated by start of the postmodernism critics that new theories are socially constructed and thus better equipped to research environment has finished with the denial of reality study that was unachievable goal. Here and it’s exactly in 1950-60s we witness emergence of the fundamental gap between Soviet humanities and western science. Soviet social science was trapped by task to construct achievable goal because otherwise socialism and all other “achievements” of the Soviet Union would be immediately turned into fiction. The problem was that some real achievements existed and this “anchor” marked the point of no return for the Soviet social sciences. Postmodernism in social sciences in principal was unacceptable though we can notice the first sprouts of postmodernism in new bright historical works which suggested new interpretation of the historical texts. Olzhas Suleimenov’s book “Az I Ya” can be seen as first shyly attempt to make a step forward towards forming new social concept. In 1960-70-s postmodernism as well as poststructuralism and other theories were humbly trying to occupy some niche in soviet social science.

But simultaneously in the Soviet Union the rise of nationalism became visible and here can be notices nearly endless potential for the empire to reflect over its own past. Suddenly past, namely history had become a very powerful social phenomenon in soviet national republics including Russia. The growth and maturation of nationalism in the USSR coincided with the best post-war time – Khrushchev “thaw”. Stalin’s nightmare was over and people finally were convinced that they were constructing “socialism with human face”. Revolutionary enthusiasm with its contempt to the imperial past was replaced by exaggeratedly respect to the history: Soviet, including Great Patriotic War (1941-45), imperial history and especially to the problems of the state origin. History as science was at stake because history was unable to answer the most acute problems but its role as a social institute increased enormously due to republics’ nationalism amplification ever seen since 1920s.

Not surprisingly, the way to effective nation-state is construction of the reality conformable with difficult and contradictory problems of the past. No western theories can comply with this grandiose task while they are drowning in postmodernism tenets. Paradoxically enough absence of political theory to throw light upon the difficulties of nation-state building in post-Soviet field should lead readers to focus on the other means to study this phenomenon. Western political theories as well as Soviet social science couldn’t suggest a broad and clear vision of the further development of Soviet nation-state and only *fiction, namely historical genre first reflected and then suggested its own trajectories of the construction of nation-state.*

The peak of the interest of Soviet society towards historical fiction covered 1960-80 when “socialist realism” lost early 1920s revolutionary enthusiasm along with opportunity to proclaim outmoded revolutionary slogans. Famous Soviet writers raised tragic and uneasy problems particularly relevant for the people in 1960-70s (part of them later were known as dissidents) while others preferred to dive deep into history to raise fundamental issues such as: origin of the nation and state, relations between society and power, reasons drove certain societies to transform into empires or modern nation-states.

Except it should be mentioned that 1960s representatives widely known as “shestiesyatniki” had experienced excited and intoxicated feelings that they were living in new fantastic reality: they were geniuses, they produced best films, music, literature and it seemed to last forever. The best decade in the history of the Soviet Union was full of glory, hope, happiness and naive beliefs in humankind. This literature couldn’t mock over past: literature respected history and in some ways we see here an image of the 1960s.

#### ***V. Ivanov versus I. Esenberlin: reconciliation with the past or denial of the future?***

The first decades of the XX century had dramatically changed a life and minds of the Kazakh people due to such significant events as February and October revolutions, civil war and Stalin’s modernization project. Less known for wide public novel of Iliyas Esenberlin “A Dangerous Fording” is devoted to problems of the growing gap between Kazakh political elite and common people. Most of historical events that had happened in the period of 1917-1920s directly or indirectly forced ordinary Kazakhs to choose the Soviet power. How did the national elite conduct meet the challenges of the time? The book was first published in 1969 and was

seeking uneasy answers to the most acute problems of Kazakhstan. In early 1900s Kazakh political elite united around *Alash* was convinced that western political liberal ideas would be appropriate niche to lead people to a better future. The main idea is to answer the question why people's choice was made in favor of simple political decisions which sometimes demonstrate better understanding of historical reality. The author argue that opposite to views of some local and western scholars (Kendirbayeva 1997; Esenova 2002) it was Russian imperial project transformation in 1960-70s that provided new tools to analyze Kazakh liberal elite failure in 1917-20s and to choose different model for nation-state building.

*Alash* nationalist movement's destiny during Soviet period (1920-30s) caused certain questions concerning primordialism role in the native history and elite attitude to imperial and Soviet Russia. Long lasting discussions between primordialists and constructivists in social sciences (Smith 1998; Hirsch 2005; Suny 2001) still has contradictive character over issues of overwhelming domination of primordialism in Soviet and post-Soviet humanities, and particularly in history. Ronald Suny sees as fundamental difference between two schools as difference between historically formed identity and a "constructed identity that simultaneously denies its contractedness" (Suny 2001). He proposed that primordialists create "histories that are based on memories organized into narratives" (Suny 2001). Consequently, all these histories produced by local writers and scholars were turned into "real histories" to become basement for construction of the nation-state while common people believed in "reality of histories".

Next part of the paper is focusing on local elite attitude to imperial and Soviet Russia. Paradox of Esenberlin's vision was a combination of "literary grasp of contemporary" and historical explanation of the 1920-30s events (Smith 1999). Local and foreign scholars agree that Kazakh liberal elite wanted "to keep the integrity of Russian state" (Rottier 2002), therefore the problem of Kazakh nation was positioned as cultural not political. Moreover, the Kazakh elite in early 1900s inspired the project of all-Kazakhs unification within the borders of national autonomy (Amanzholova 1993). It was *Alash* leaders promoted systematic publications on Kazakh history in local journals and newspapers where they declared historical rights of Kazakh people to occupy their lands. Obviously, these moves of "liberal elite" cannot be viewed as liberalism in western context.

Alexander Motyl's reflections on nature of Russian empire added some acute moments to novel analysis. He argued that cultural differentiation between imperial elite and periphery population would gradually disappear due to extensive assimilation of other ethnicities (Motyl 2004). Second generation of Kazakh elite was mainly pro-Russian. They believed that steps to become "civilized member" of empire were sedentarization, secularization and education in western meaning of terms. They never had intentions to separate from Russia. Relations between local and imperial elite due to process of assimilation and Russification could lead to some "convergence" as Motyl supposed. This turning point would stop empire to exist (Motyl 1997).

Elite theory of Pareto added some essential details to analysis of elite behavior in 1917-20s and reasons led to its failure. Vilfredo Pareto suggested circulation of elite theory that explained how ruling elite can be replaced by other. He insisted that "history is a graveyard for aristocracies" (Pareto, 1935). In some ways *Alash* leaders were aristocracy of Kazakh society because they suggested elitist national project based on western modern approaches, while new elite was more inclining to simpler and clear options (Amanzholova 2009).

Here we can point out the moment of *divergence* between Russian and national elites. Some steps of Russian intelligentsia can be interpreted as way to convergence with West. From 1960-70s republics were moving in different directions: Russia was trying to get rapprochement with West while national elites developed further nationalistic projects focused on legalization of territorial claims for their own ethnic nation. Revival of primordialism and appeal to 'glorious past' became trajectories of nation-state construction during next decade after demise of the Soviet Union. This assumption can be supported by other difference of cultural models of Russia and national republics in modern Central Asia. Modernization plays very important role for "western republics" societies in Soviet space thus pressing them to transform into more westernized entity. At the same time Asian republics and Kazakhstan at lesser extent, were moving towards process of "re-traditionalization with their pre-modern institutes".

## Conclusion

When empires disintegrate then it happen along the certain lines such as ethnic, political, economic, geopolitical, etc. But what happen then? How to

restore or to reorganize a new entity? The author insists that in most cases the lines of secession are the most important to construct a new nation-state. If the line of secession was based on abnegation of all previous ties then a new nation-state would be driven by denial of the previous experience. As author argues this strategy of nation-state construction means inclination towards western ahistorical

postmodernism that mean that surrounding reality would represent clusters of disconnected historical periods. Thus, new independent states' political elite is facing a problem of integrative program that fits majority of society. In order to overcome threats of break-up of new fragile independent country the elites were forced to use the old recipes had created in 1960-70s.

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