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Humanities in Kazakhstan: development, challenges and characteristics

Modern Kazakhstan has become a kind of testing ground for various experiments in all spheres of public and state life. This is explained by the progressive policies pursued by the country's current leadership. Despite its autonomy and independence, Kazakhstan cannot help but be involved in the general global process, in the general dynamic space. And the problems that arise in one sphere or another directly or indirectly affect Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, the influence of crisis moments in modern humanities in the fields of science, education and public life is felt. In this article, the author attempts to analyse the general state of humanities knowledge in Kazakhstan and, as far as possible, to identify the most important and promising directions in the process of overcoming the crisis in the humanities. The author draws particular attention to the fact that this crisis is especially acute in the fields of education and science. In this sense, the humanities have been relegated to the sidelines of the educational process. Today's attitudes mainly prioritise natural science and applied research. The humanities have become merely an afterthought in the research sphere. In the article, the author assesses the extent of the problems in the humanities and provides a fundamental evaluation of this phenomenon.

Keywords: humanitarian sphere, culture, reforms, education, science, reform, crisis, values

Introduction

As part of the global academic community, Kazakhstan is pursuing its own unique path in the development of the humanities, reflecting both global trends and specific national conditions.

In the years since independence in 1991, the country's humanities sector has undergone a profound transformation, as Kazakh humanities faced the tasks of changing ideological paradigms (moving away from the rigid Marxist-Leninist canon), restoring and rethinking national historical and cultural identity, and integrating into the global scientific community. In a relatively short period of time, the country's humanities education underwent a worldview transformation caused by tectonic shifts on the geopolitical map and the processes of globalisation [1]. While in Soviet times the humanities often served ideological purposes, in the new era there was a need to rebuild them on the principles of pluralism and scientific objectivity.

Over the 30 years of independence, Kazakhstan has significantly expanded its humanities and joined the global intellectual exchange, so today, research into humanities issues is conducted at many universities and scientific institutes in the country. It is worth noting that the state recognises the role and importance of social and humanities knowledge in stabilising society, and this position is reflected in various programmes where humanities knowledge is seen as a resource for developing and strengthening the national idea. Kazakh humanities scholars have made a significant contribution to understanding issues of national identity, interethnic harmony, the state language, cultural heritage, spiritual renewal, etc.

Nevertheless, alongside these achievements, certain problems are also keenly felt (insufficient funding for research, bureaucratisation of science, focus on formal indicators to the detriment of substance). A specific problem is the language issue: after the collapse of the USSR, there was an acute shortage of high-quality educational and scientific literature in the Kazakh language, so for a long time, humanities education relied mainly on Russian-language and translated texts, which created a gap between the language of science and the native language of a significant part of the population.

It is also important to note the difficult situation facing humanities education. Many Kazakhstani teachers often express concern that humanities education is losing its depth and educational component. As early as 2012, Professor Zhahan Moldabekov noted that the humanities sphere of education in Kazakhstan had reached an impasse. In his opinion, "the social sciences and humanities are losing their fundamental basis, ideological continuity, social problem orientation and individual value" [2].

There is a dangerous tendency to break with traditions while thoughtlessly borrowing Western models, with one part of the population idealising everything Western and rejecting national values as outdated,

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while another part, on the contrary, rejects everything foreign and extols its own traditions, which is equally destructive to culture. This imbalance leads to a crisis of meaning, in which the problems of the humanities begin to be determined not by the real demands of society, but by the subjective attitudes of administrators or the circumstances of the moment.

It is also worth mentioning the phenomenon of the dominance of “commercial discourse,” in which education is attributed only the function of preparing students for the market, which in the long run leads to a devaluation of personal self-worth and a decline in independent thinking. Many complain that in such circumstances, education is reduced to “drilling” students to pass tests successfully, rather than developing real skills and abilities.

In Kazakhstan, as in many post-Soviet countries, scientific and educational structures remained fragmented for a long time, with academic institutions and universities operating in isolation, which hindered the emergence and development of sustainable schools. Although steps have been taken towards integration in recent years, with leading universities gaining greater autonomy, bureaucratic control remains quite high, as many reforms are initiated “from above” and scientists and teachers often act merely as executors of instructions. This leads to the suppression of creative initiatives at the local level, and ready-made templates do not always take into account the specifics of the humanities, as a result of which the humanities lose their multi-vector functions.

Overall, the current state of humanities in Kazakhstan can be characterised as follows: it is a field with great intellectual potential and a rich historical and cultural foundation, which is currently undergoing modernisation and self-determination.

Kazakhstan’s humanities strive to meet international quality standards, actively adopt new theories and methods, and integrate into global research. They are called upon to solve local problems of strengthening national identity, spiritual development of society, and preservation of the unique heritage of the peoples of Kazakhstan.

The humanities in Kazakhstan need to be both globally competitive and locally relevant. It is in this balance between tradition and innovation that we see the key to successful modernisation of the humanities.

Methods and materials

Such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon as the humanities requires an equally complex methodological research perspective. Following contemporary research trends in post-classical science, we have used an interdisciplinary approach to understand the chosen research object in this article. The most effective methods for evaluating the humanities include: qualitative analysis (provides an opportunity for deep insight into the content of the text, helps to appreciate the essence of cultural phenomena and various contexts).

The historical method allows us to comprehend and evaluate the formation, development, and influence of cultural processes and the most significant ideas and concepts; the comparative method helps to correlate various historical and cultural phenomena, reveal their originality and interconnection; The expert assessment method involves obtaining a panoramic view of the humanities object under study through the opinions of experts in the field of humanities knowledge and humanities sciences. Discourse analysis allows us to understand and comprehend the ways in which meanings and values are expressed and formed at the level of complex communications and text volumes. These methods allow for a comprehensive assessment of the quality and significance of humanities research. To ensure the completeness of the research picture, this article uses general scientific and philosophical methods: historical, logical, systemic-structural analysis, phenomenological and hermeneutic methods. This methodological symbiosis allowed the author to most fully express his point of view on the subject of humanities in its Kazakhstani format.

Results and discussion

The analysis showed that the humanities today face a number of challenges, but at the same time, new opportunities for their development are opening up. In light of this, we will formulate key promising areas for reform and growth in the humanities, both on a global scale and as they apply to Kazakhstan.

Humanisation and value-oriented education. One of the main conclusions reached by thinkers (both Western and Russian) is that education should not be reduced to purely utilitarian goals and the training of purely functional specialists; there needs to be a return to the humanistic mission of education, namely the cultivation of well-rounded individuals capable of critical thinking and empathy. Martha Nussbaum reminds us that the humanities instil in children the ability to think critically and put themselves in someone else’s shoes, which is a prerequisite for a successful democracy. Consequently, educational reform must provide

for a strengthening of the humanities at all levels, from school to university [3]. Future reforms may include updating curricula with an emphasis on Kazakh and world culture, introducing interdisciplinary humanities courses for all specialities, and supporting student initiatives in various areas of volunteering.

Interdisciplinarity and integration of sciences. The 21st century is an era of complex problems, whether climate change, global pandemics or social inequality; such problems do not have narrow sectoral solutions, they require a comprehensive approach that combines knowledge from various sciences. The humanities have the potential to become equal partners in this interdisciplinary dialogue, as they have a conventional communicative function, i.e., they help to develop a common language and values for cooperation. An important task is to create platforms for interaction where historians, sociologists, IT specialists, ecologists, cultural studies specialists, and others could work on joint projects. It is worth developing transdisciplinary research on topics that are priorities for the country (interethnic harmony, digitalisation, urbanisation, etc.), involving both domestic and foreign specialists. The new methodology should be based on a synthesis of post-Soviet experience and global scientific discoveries, and humanities scholars should actively participate in this synthesis.

Digital transformation of the humanities. It is already clear that digital technologies are inevitably changing the face of science, so the humanities must master them, but on their own terms. Mastering digital processes should not be reduced solely to instrumentalisation, although promising areas are quite obvious here: Big Data in sociology and linguistics, geoinformation technologies in history, neural networks for digitising and analysing large amounts of text, online platforms for collaboration between scholars around the world, etc. It is extremely important for humanities scholars to contribute to the understanding of the digital age, and one of the most important tasks here is protective — not to allow people to become “digital slaves.” In other words, promising reforms include the development of digital competence alongside ethical literacy, as it is this mutual exchange that will ensure a more humane development of technology.

Support for scientific personnel and continuity. In our opinion, the most important area of reform is the rejuvenation and strengthening of humanities personnel. It is necessary to attract young people to scientific research work and to create social mobility and incentives for them. The country’s population of 18 million has only about 22,000 researchers, which is significantly less than in developed countries [4]. It is necessary to raise the prestige of scientific careers (expand grant support for humanities projects, establish named scholarships and awards for young scientists, and provide internships abroad). It is also important to restore and establish the continuity of schools (Soviet science nurtured entire schools of Orientalists, literary scholars, and historians; unfortunately, some of them have been lost today, although some traditions remain). It is necessary to institutionally organise and strengthen the tradition of mentoring, within which experienced professors would pass on their knowledge to the next generation not only through lectures, but also through joint research, expeditions, clubs and circles.

International cooperation and cultural dialogue. It is necessary to strengthen the active presence of Kazakhstani humanities in international journals, UNESCO projects, and global discussions, while at the same time enriching domestic humanities with the best achievements of foreign thought. The international aspect is important because the humanities are a space for cultural diplomacy, and joint humanitarian initiatives strengthen mutual understanding between peoples.

Globally, the future of the humanities lies in their active adaptation and interaction with technology, other sciences and society, while retaining their core values of critical reflection, value analysis and attention to the human dimension of current processes.

Promising reforms should be evolutionary, involving humanities scholars themselves, the general public, and young people in the discussion, because only in an atmosphere of free and diverse dialogue can a new paradigm of humanities knowledge be developed that is adequate for the 21st century.

Conclusion

The analysis showed that it is wrong to talk about the complete decline of the humanities; rather, we are witnessing a phase of restructuring and renewal under the influence of external and internal factors.

A historical overview reminded us that humanities knowledge has gone through crises and downturns more than once, emerging from them enriched with new ideas. Therefore, today, at the beginning of a new century, when humanities scholars face unprecedented challenges, it is worth remembering that these challenges also bring unprecedented opportunities.

The value of the humanities lies not in immediate benefits, but in preserving what is most human in human beings. Therefore, investing in humanities knowledge means investing in a sustainable and humane future.

In Kazakhstan, the humanities play a special role in strengthening national identity and spiritual sovereignty. Having gone through a difficult period in the 1990s and 2000s, today it is becoming integrated into the global space while retaining its specificity. Kazakhstan's humanities face complex challenges that require a delicate balance to be resolved; they must be both modern and globally competitive, while at the same time preserving historical continuity and focusing on local issues.

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С.М. Жакин

Қазақстандағы гуманитарлық білім: дамуы, мәселелері және ерекшеліктері

Қазіргі Қазақстан қоғамдық және мемлекеттік өмірдің барлық салаларында түрлі эксперименттер үшін өзіндік алаңға айналды. Бұл елдің бүгінгі баспылығы жүзеге асыратын прогрессивті саясатпен түсіндіріледі. Қазақстан өзінің тәуелсіздігі мен дербестігіне қарамастан, жалпы жаһандық үдеріске, ортақ динамикалық кеңістікке араласпай тұра алмайды. Және қандай да бір салада туындайтын проблемалар тікелей немесе жанама түрде Қазақстанға да қатысты. Қазақстанда ғылым, білім, қоғамдық өмір саласындағы қазіргі гуманитаристикадағы дағдарыс сәттерінің әсері сезіледі. Мақалада автор Қазақстандағы гуманитарлық білімнің жалпы жай-күйін түбегейлі талдауға және мүмкіндігінше гуманитарлық саладағы дағдарысты еңсеру үдерісіндегі ең маңызды және перспективалы бағыттарды анықтауға тырысқан. Автор бұл дағдарыстың әсіресе білім беру саласында және ғылымда көрінетініне ерекше назар аударады. Бұл тұрғыда гуманитарлық ғылымдар оқу процесінің шетіне ығыстырылуда. Бүгінгі көзқарастар негізінен жаратылыстану-ғылыми зерттеулерге, қолданбалы зерттеулерге басымдық береді. Өйткені гуманитарлық ғылым зерттеу кеңістігінде қалыс қалуда. Мақала авторы гуманитарлық ғылымдағы жағдайдың проблемалық дәрежесін бағалайды, осы құбылысқа түбегейлі баға береді.

Кілт сөздер: гуманитарлық сала, мәдениет, реформалар, білім, ғылым, реформа, дағдарыс, құндылықтар.

С.М. Жакин

Гуманитарное знание в Казахстане: развитие, проблемы и особенности

Современный Казахстан стал своего рода площадкой для различного рода экспериментов во всех сферах общественной и государственной жизни. Это объясняется той прогрессивной политикой, которая осуществляется нынешним руководством страны. При всей самостоятельности и независимости Казахстана не может не быть вовлечен в общий мировой процесс, в общее динамичное пространство. Проблемы, которые возникают в той или иной сфере, прямым или косвенным образом касаются и Казахстана. В Казахстане ощущается влияние кризисных моментов в современной гуманитаристике, в сфере науки, образования и общественной жизни. В данной статье автор попытался принципиально проанализировать общее состояние гуманитарного знания в Казахстане и, по возможности, опреде-

лить наиболее важные и перспективные направления в процессе преодоления кризиса в гуманитарной сфере. Автор обращает особое внимание на то, что особенно болезненно этот кризис проявляется в сфере образования и в науке. В этом смысле гуманитаристика ушла на задворки образовательного процесса. Современные установки в основном определяют приоритет естественно-научным и прикладным исследованиям. Гуманитаристика стала лишь довеском в исследовательском пространстве. Автор в статье оценивает степень проблемности положения дел в гуманитаристике и дает принципиальную оценку этому явлению.

Ключевые слова: гуманитарная сфера, культура, реформы, образование, наука, реформа, кризис, ценности.

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