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To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to submit this report on the dissertation of Ms **Ulzhan Zhangel'dynovna Tuleshova**, "The Kazakh nobility in the service of the Russian Empire in the 19th century: Formation and activity," which she will soon be defending at your university. Along with Professor G. S. Sultangaliev there at KazNU, I have served as a scholarly advisor for this project. In 2018 Ms Tuleshova spent a month working with me here in Las Vegas, and we have been collaborating since then on a joint article that grows out of her dissertation work. Though I am a specialist in the history of the Russian Empire sooner than of Kazakhstan specifically, I nonetheless feel qualified to offer an evaluation of Ms Tuleshova's work, which undoubtedly represents a contribution to Russian imperial history.

First of all, allow me to emphasize the fact that Ms Tuleshova has written the entire dissertation in English, which represents a significant feat—especially for a graduate student who has not had the opportunity to study formally in an English-language country. To be sure, the English is not in all cases entirely idiomatic, and some passages require a bit of work to ensure full intelligibility, but on the whole the work is readable and understandable. My guess is that Ms Tuleshova has learned a great deal from this process and now stands ready to move forward with new works in English as her career develops.

Turning to the subject matter, I can state that the dissertation takes up an important topic about which, to the best of my knowledge, virtually nothing has been written. For a long time the social history of Russia has focused almost entirely on the core Russian provinces of the empire, and if over time there has been a growing recognition of the substantial number of non-Russians in the "Russian" nobility—Ms Tuleshova notes that they made up close to half of that important estate—scholars have focused mostly on non-Russians in the western borderlands: Germans, Poles, and to some extent Georgians. And whereas a few scholars have analyzed the experience of Muslim nobles, above all Tatar ones, I am still not aware of any work, until this dissertation, on Kazakh nobles. In

fact, I can safely say that I did not even know that such a group existed. What that means is that Ms Tuleshova is offering an important contribution to the social history of Imperial Russia, one that is especially valuable, in my view, because it deals precisely with the “edge” or the margins of this important estate. As historians have long recognized, many important phenomena are best understood precisely from their margins, since this is where their limits are defined.

The dissertation is also an important contribution to our understanding of Russian imperial rule. Here, I am inclined to defer above all to specialists on Kazakhstan, such as Professor Sultangaliev, but my impression is that while we as scholars have a good understanding of important dimensions of Russia’s expansion into the Kazakh steppe—the use of Kazakh intermediaries, the creation of new official posts for Kazakhs in the 1820s-30s, the involvement of Kazakhs in important enterprises such as the campaign against Khiva in 1839-40—until now we have had little understanding of the tsarist regime’s attempt to use the privileges of nobility to draw leading and/or promising Kazakhs into communion with Russia. The research here offers much food for comparative thought regarding other nobilities—Ms Tuleshova offers some of this comparison herself.

Finally, the dissertation offers new insights into the history of Kazakhstan itself. While Ms Tuleshova pays much attention to the interests and initiatives of the state, she seeks also to reveal, as much as her sources allow, how Kazakhs themselves viewed the opportunities that nobility represented for them. She makes clear that most of them, initially, did not fully understand the nature of the privileges to which nobility might ideally entitle them, and that, even as growing awareness appeared, most Kazakhs sought to use those privileges for very distinct purposes that were specifically relevant to their place in a nomadic economy featuring animal husbandry rather than agriculture.

A few other observations are warranted here about the nature and scope of Ms Tuleshova’s research. First, the work is impressively comparative. Ms Tuleshova makes a distinct effort to sketch out in considerable detail the nature of noble status in Russia generally, which makes for a more meaningful consideration of the Kazakh case specifically. Moreover, she explicitly compares the Kazakh nobility to other Muslim nobilities (Tatar and Bashkir), as well as the nobilities of other (semi-) nomadic groups (Bashkirs and Kalmyks). These comparisons represent a real asset to the project.

Second, the dissertation features work in an impressive set of archives ranging across Eurasia—from Petersburg, through cities such as Samara and Orenburg, through to Almaty itself. These are clearly the most important repositories for research on this topic, and it is impressive that Ms Tuleshova has managed to accomplish so much in this regard.

Third, I find similarly interesting that Ms Tuleshova disaggregates various forms, or levels, of privilege both within the noble category itself (hereditary, personal, titled, etc.) and in relation to a second category—honored citizen—which provides a broader conception of

the different forms that privilege in the Russian social order could take. And of course she explores Kazakhs' engagement with these different forms.

Fourth, Ms Tuleshova engages thoughtfully and seriously with historical literature in both Russian and English. In my view, she has taken seriously the findings of the most important scholars relevant to her own inquiry.

Finally, I find Ms Tuleshova's conclusions broadly convincing. She reveals that there were two essential phases in tsarist policy on this question: the first entailed drawing the existing elite, mostly sultans, into noble status where and when that was appropriate; and the second exhibited a greater openness to Kazakhs of talent, loyalty, and education (and this even as the country as generally making it harder for new entrants to make their way into the nobility). Ms Tuleshova suggests that for most of the history concerned, Kazakhs aspiring to or even already enjoying noble status thought about its benefits in relation to larger local concerns that were fundamentally related to the nomadic economy (even as that very economy was being altered by the advance of Russian institutions and eventually settlers into the steppe). She thereby reveals that both for state authorities, who never made noble status for Kazakhs exactly what it was for others; and for Kazakhs, who had their own preoccupations, nobility in the steppe was always something similar to nobility elsewhere in Russia but never quite the same.

No doubt, there are particular matters of interpretation that I might challenge or on which I might ask Ms Tuleshova for further clarification. I also have thoughts about how to improve the dissertation organizationally (should she, for example, wish to seek publication for the work eventually). But as I see it, the dissertation defense is the place for me to raise such issues and questions. And I look forward to that discussion.

Let me end, then, by stating that this is important and significant work. If the definition of a good dissertation is a work that adds substantively to our collective understanding of an important issue or set of issues, then Ms Tuleshova's "The Kazakh Nobility" certainly qualifies.

Sincerely



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Professor