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**IBN KHALDUN:  
INFLUENCE OF LIFE AND IDEAS ON POST-SOVIET UNION  
COUNTRIES**

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**Abstract**

We can find great interest to Ibn Khaldun personality and legacy both in late Soviet Union period and during nation-building period after the collapse of the USSR. In the article are analyzed reasons for such interest, examples of use of his personality and ideas in different domains of social life, and applicability of his legacy to modern world problems. Ibn Khaldun's legacy interpretation and ideas are important in the developing of statehood at the post-Soviet space.

**Keywords:** Ibn Khaldun, legacy, interpretation, statehood.

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**İbn Haldun:  
Hayatı ve Fikirlerinin Sovyetler Birliği Sonrasındaki  
Ülkeler Üzerindeki Etkisi**

**Özet**

Gerek Sovyetler Birliği'in son dönemlerinde ve gerekse SSCB'nin yıkılmasından sonraki ulus inşası sürecinde İbn Haldun'un şahsına ve fikirlerine büyük bir ilgi oluşmuştur. Bu makalede bu ilginin nedenleri, İbn Haldun'un şahsı ve fikirlerinin farklı sosyal yaşam alanlarındaki uygulanışı ve onun mirasının modern dünyanın sorunlarına uygulanabilirliği yönünden ele alınacaktır. İbn Haldun'un fikirleri ve mirasının yorumları, Sovyetler sonrası dönemdeki devlet fikrinin gelişimi için önem arz etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İbn Haldun, miras, yorum, devlet.

**Резюме**

**Ибн Халдун: Влияние жизни и идей на постсоветских стран**

Можно обнаружить огромный интерес к личности и наследию Ибн Хальдуна как в позднесоветский период, так и во время строительства национальных государств после краха СССР. В статье анализируются причины такого интереса, примеры использования его личности и идей в различных сферах социальной жизни, и применимость его наследия к современным мировым проблемам. Идеи Ибн Хальдун и представления о его наследии важны для развития национальных государств на постсоветском пространстве.

**Ключевые слова:** Ибн Хальдун, наследие, интерпретации, государственность.

One of most important dimension of modern social science is development of theoretical tools to describe non-Western societies, that didn't take part in the "collective ideality" of the West. When we use traditional tools of social science, developed in Western tradition, we often found the only result – absence in non-Western societies that or another characteristic feature of Western ones. While this is also important result, we still need tools able to find also vital features of non-Western societies that make them vivid alternative of Western model of social development, creating trend of Easternization of Western Hemisphere. We need also tools that will help find something unusual about Western society itself. For that aim it is necessary to study legacy of great non-Western thinkers whose ideas were missed, mutilated or not fully employed in Western social science research tradition. Legacy of Ibn Khaldun looks very appropriate for this aim.

Ibn Khaldun, talented administrative leader and scientist, was able to predict many modern trends in History, Economic Theory, Political Science and Sociology in XIV century, yet some of these sciences were not existed in his times. We can mention great interest to Ibn Khaldun personality and teaching in late Soviet Union period. His ideas were widely discussed and published in many articles and monographs of Soviet scientists. The reason why it happened has several possible interpretations.

First of all, rapid development of social sciences in the USSR in 1960-1970s required search of new theories, interpretations and doctrines of social and political processes. Meanwhile modern Western ideas and theories were treated as ideologically dangerous. Ibn Khaldun's legacy became useful one – it was non-Western and was fully applicable to study complex processes in social systems from different perspectives.

Second, priority for new theories and interpretations was done for secular ones. Ibn Khaldun's teaching had high rational kernel, and was treated by Soviet scientists as practically secular one<sup>1</sup>.

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1 S. M. Bacieva, **Istoriko-sociologicheskii traktat Ibn Halduna «Mukaddima»** Moskva 1965, [**Historical and Sociological Treatise of Ibn Khaldun**], A. Ignatenko, **Ibn Hal'dun**, Moskva 1980.

Third, high distribution of Ibn Khaldun's legacy was a sign of respect to non-Slavic population of the USSR, especially with former Muslim legacy. Moscow was ready to promote teaching of Oriental scientist with clear secular tendencies in eastern part of the Soviet Union. Ibn Khaldun's aggrandizement was important part of ideological work with population to increase strength of Soviet power. He was powerful alternative to modern Western theories in social sciences, part of which were aimed against Soviet rule.

Fourth, high interest to Ibn Khaldun was also a result of development of ethno-national processes in Asian part of the USSR. Intellectuals from Central Asian region and Azerbaijan looked for influential figures from history of Oriental civilization to change traditional image of this region as less developed, both economically and spiritually, part of the USSR. Genghis Khan or Tamerlane, for example, were well-known, but mostly as very ferocious men, especially for Slavic part of the USSR. Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd had much more attractive reputation to amplify status of peoples of Central Asia and Azerbaijan in their own eyes and in eyes of their Slavic neighbors.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union adaptability of Ibn Khaldun's legacy to Marxism became unimportant. Alternatively, the tendency to find out Islamic roots in his teaching is highly visible. Additionally, there is high interest to economic aspects of his teaching, and political theory about interactions of elites with ordinary people in the situation of nation-building processes. We can found the next trends in use of Ibn Khaldun's teaching at the post-Soviet scene:

In Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, interest to legacy of Ibn Khaldun is threefold:

1. Solid Islamic communities in these countries use Ibn Khaldun' ideas and image to strength the identity of their umma, to show others big potential that Islamic thinkers already had when Europe built its first universities. For example, see headlines of articles of Muhamed

Salyahetdinov, Head of Association of NGO's "Sobranie" "The father of Sociology - Ibn Khaldun. The Science, inspired by the Qur'an" and Ibrahim Salih "Forgotten father of Political Economy, Sociology and Political Science. Ibn Khaldun about the reasons of decline of civilizations"<sup>2</sup>. In these articles teaching of Ibn Khaldun acquired much more Islamic interpretation, than secular one. Especially it is obvious in article written by Ibrahim Salih. He interpreted Ibn Khaldun's teaching via the Qur'an, which this Islamic thinker used permanently "being faithful and god-fearing Moslem" (Salih, 2007).

2. High actuality in Russia, Georgia and Ukraine acquired ideas of Ibn Khaldun about the role that elites play in the development of states. Due to rapid privatization, conducted with numerous violations, all three societies became highly differentiated, with small rich community at the top and all others at the bottom. Elites took such part of national income that it hampers the development of economy, exactly according to developed by Ibn Khaldun model.

Iryna Predborska, professor of Department of Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Education of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University was written about situation at Ukraine in such a way "immorality of politicians is serious threat for weak, nonrooted statehood which poor recourses were used for realization of increasingly rising appetites of powerful elites" (personal communication, 18 February 2009).

The Head of the Center of Social Philosophy and Theoretical History (Russian Academy of Science) professor Nikolai Rozov even wrote the article

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2 I. Salih, **Zabytyi otec politekonomii, sociologii i politologii. Ibn Hal'dun o prichinah upadka civilizacii. [Forgotten Father of Politic-Economy, Sociology and Political Science: Ibn Khaldun, About the Fall of Civilisations]** 2007, retrieved from [http://islam.com.ua/articles/meet\\_islam/forgotten\\_history/316/](http://islam.com.ua/articles/meet_islam/forgotten_history/316/) ; M. Salyahetdinov, **Otec sociologii – Ibn Haldun. Nauka, Vdohnovlennaya Koranom. [Father of Sociology – Ibn Khaldun Science Inspired by Koran]**, 2007, retrieved from <http://www.islam.ru/science/scholars/haldun/>.

devoted to applicability of Ibn Khaldun's elite model to research of modern Russian situation, and found that "it could be used in discussions on the wide historical topics, including interpretation of realities of modern Russia"<sup>3</sup>.

3. Teaching of Ibn Khaldun come in the focus from the point of its methodological usefulness to study historical development of civilizations. Sergey V. Tsirel, Main research Fellow of VNIMI, Russian Academy of Sciences, studied concept of Asabiyyah and found that "scarcity of material that Ibn Khaldun could use do not oppose breadth of generalizations he made"<sup>4</sup>.

Peter Turchin, American scientist of Russian origin (professor at the University of Connecticut) suggested a novel mathematical expression of the sociological theory of Ibn Khaldun from the point of the development of mathematical models of long-term ("secular") sociodemographic cycles<sup>5</sup>. Peter Turchin is widely involving colleagues from Russian universities in research of this topic (see, for example Turchin & Korotayev<sup>6</sup>).

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3 N. Rozov, "Zakon Ibn Halduna. K chemu mozhet privesti rost korrupcii i silovogo prinuzhdeniya v Rossii" ["Law of Ibn Khaldun. what may bring the growth of corruption and coercion in Russia"] **Politicheskii klass [Political Class]**, 16, 2006, retrieved from [http://cliodynamics.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=56&Itemid=49](http://cliodynamics.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=56&Itemid=49)

4 Tsirel S., "Koncept «asabiiii» kak osnova svyazi ekonomiko-demograficheskoi i gumanitarnoi istorii: pro et contra", ["The Concept of "Asabiyyah" as a Basis for Connection of Economy-Demographic and Humanitarian History"], **Problemy matematicheskoi istorii. Istoricheskaya rekonstrukciya, prognozirovaniye, metodologiya. [Problems of mathematical history. Historical reconstruction, prediction and methodology]** (Eds. G. G. Malineckii, & A. V. Korotayev), Izdatel'stvo LKI Moscow 2008, retrieved from [http://cliodynamics.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=59&Itemid=49](http://cliodynamics.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=59&Itemid=49)

5 P. Turchin, "Modeling Periodic Waves of Integration in the Afroeurasian World System", **Globalization as an Evolutionary Process: Modeling Global Change** (Eds. G. Modelski, T. Devezas, & W. R. Thompson), London 2008, pp. 161-189.

6 P. Turchin, & A. Korotayev, "Population Density and Warfare: A Reconsideration", **Social Evolution & History**, vol. V/2, (2006), pp. 121-158.

In Belarus, the republic with the Eastern-Slavic population, and very small Islamic minority Ibn Khaldun is mainly in use for teaching in courses of Philosophy, Sociology and Political Science. There are no big discussions about possible impact of his theories or about role of elites in the development of the state. The main reason for that lies in practical dimension – the Belarusian population is much less differentiated if compares to Russia, Georgia or Ukraine, and political system is much more stable. Even in the World Factbook, published by the CIA, was mentioned “A wide range of redistributive policies has helped those at the bottom of the ladder; the Gini coefficient is among the lowest in the world”<sup>7</sup>. Despite the absence of necessity to adapt Ibn Khaldun’ role of elites theory to Belarusian reality, he is well treated as one of main theorists of the world. As mentioned Associate Professor of Department of Ideology and Political Science (Academy of Public Administration, Minsk, Belarus) Alexei Filippovich “The main novelty of this Islam thinker is that economy was treated as the key factor in the development of social-political processes. That is the factor that was developed in the Western theories only in XVIII-XIX centuries, so we can see Ibn Khaldun as the scholar who was substantially ahead of the times” (personal communication, 12 February 2009). According to Vjacheslav Kochergin, Head of Department of Economic Sociology of the Belarusian State Economic University, “many modern theories deal with social phenomena looks one-dimensional if compare them with rich multi-dimensional analysis of Ibn Khaldun”. “The concept of Asabiyyah, proposed by Ibn Khaldun, found its implementation in teachings of many well-known scientists of XIX-XX centuries, from Thorstein Veblen to Pierre Bourdieu and Lev Gumilyov” (personal communication, 16 February 2009).

In post-Soviet states, where Muslim population is dominated (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan) are in use secular political systems, so trends that were characteristic for this republics

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7 **The World Factbook**, 2009, retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/bo.html>

during Soviet times are continue. Elites in these states found themselves in the position of primary necessity to find equilibrium between Islam as a way for cohesion of the population instead of Soviet ideology and secular system of state governing that could protect their status position<sup>8</sup>. In such a situation figure of Ibn Khaldun looks very suitable for propagation. He is prominent secular scientist and at the same time famous for his religious activity. So, Ibn Khaldun is important as the figure to demonstrate old traditions of Muslims knowledge and talent.

Andrei Kazantsev, Head of analytical Center of MGIMO-University (Moscow, Russia), that was born and long period worked in Central Asia region, is sure that teaching of Ibn Khaldun has tremendous significance for Central Asia both in historical perspective and in present time, because he described how easily high civilizations and developed political systems could be destroyed by barbarity. It was often in history of Central Asian states, and this is currently central because these states are now experience problems of failed statehood (personal communication, 3 February 2009).

In other post-Soviet republics (Armenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Estonia) influence of personality and ideas of Ibn Khaldun is low. While all that states, according to Russian model, have high Gini coefficient and numerous problems with unstable political systems (mainly due to problems of ethnical origin), personality of Ibn Khaldun is not popular. There are different reasons for such a practice. Armenia, for example, has numerous problems with Islamic Azerbaijan about the fate of Nagorny Karabakh, and such complex relations with Muslims makes problematic substantial interest to Islamic thinker. In Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Estonia situation is different. Three of these countries became members of the European Union, the one (Moldova) is eager

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8 L. Blyaher, & S. Kizima, "Central'naya Azija: mezhdru Tamerlanom i Ataturkom (konstruirovaniye nacional'nyh gosudarstv v epohu postmoderna)". ["Central Asia, between Tamerlane and Ataturk, Nation building and postmodern age"] **Politija [Polity]**, 1, (2009), pp. 96-110.



to do it. As new adepts in Western sphere, scientists in these countries give their preference to Western scientists and theories, not to old Muslim ones.

*Interpretation and reaction to ideas of Ibn Khaldun by the Russian Orthodox Church.* Orthodox Archpriest, Father Pavel Boyankov thinks that main reasons that Ibn Khaldun used in his theory of state development, are based both in the Qur'an and the Bible, so he is not fully secular thinker, as it was supposed in Soviet times. According to Father Boyankov, "any extremes that go beyond "daily bread", as it many times mentioned both in the Qur'an and the Bible, always were destructive for the humankind. It was so in all times – from the King Solomon and Ibn Khaldun to our days of global crisis" (personal communication, 11 February 2009).

According to Alexei Filippovich "Ibn Khaldun, in contrast to Western thinkers, was able to preserve harmonic balance between principles of Theology and Sociology, religious and secular points of view, without going to militant atheism or religious fanaticism" (personal communication, 12 February 2009).

Professor of Moscow State University Alexander Ignatenko mentions that Ibn Khaldun has the reputation of "largest expert of all complex of Muslim religious disciplines and is scientist-rationalist".

*Preparation of PhD dissertations.* Due to many-sidedness of interests and talents of Ibn Khaldun, his concepts and ideas were used in many dissertations, sometimes in very different fields. They are as follows:

"Power and state in the Philosophy of Ibn Khaldun"<sup>10</sup>.

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9 A. Ignatenko, "Obman v kontekste arabo-islamskoi kul'tury Srednevekov'ya: po materialam "knyazh'ih zercal"."[Cheating in Middle Ages Arab-Islamic cultural context: in materials of Knyazhev Zertsalov"], **Odissei. Chelovek v istorii [Odyssey. Man and History]**, (Ed. A. Y. Gurevich), Moscow 1993, pp. 138-161

10 D. Fomina, **Vlast' i gosudarstvo v filosofii Ibn Khalduna: [Power and State in Philosophy of Ibn Khaldun]**, Dis. kand. filos. nauk: Moskva 2003.

“Modern mechanisms of activation of consumer demand”<sup>11</sup>.

“Sustainable development as the special way of interaction of society and state”<sup>12</sup>.

“Formation and functioning of turko-tatar literature language of the period of the Golden Horde”<sup>13</sup>.

“Common law as the form of regulation of social relations in Yemen’s society”<sup>14</sup>.

“Temporal aspect of categorical attitude of presence”<sup>15</sup>.

“The problem of formation of ecological culture of the peoples of North Caucasus”<sup>16</sup>.

Of course, dissertation of Dar’ya Fomina is especially interesting for us, being devoted fully to Ibn Khaldun. As she wrote, Ibn Khaldun “created theory of power and the state, the real meaning of which was beyond the scope of its

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11 Y. Mygyeva, **Sovremennye mehanizmy aktivizatsii potrebitel’skogo sprosa [Modern mechanisms of enhancing consumer demand]**, Dis. kand. ekon. nauk: Moskva 2003.

12 F. Aizyatov, **Ustoichivoe razvitie kak osoboe sostoyanie vzaimodeistviya sociuma i prirody [Sustainable Development as a Special Condition of the Interaction of Society and Nature]**, Dis. d-ra filos. nauk: Saransk 1999.

13 F. Nurieva, **Formirovanie i funkcionirovanie tyurko-tatarskogo literaturnogo yazyka perioda Zolotoi Ordy [Formation and Functioning of the Turko-Tatar Literary Language of the Golden Horde era]**, Dis. d-ra filol. nauk: Kazan’ 2004.

14 M. Seif, **Obychnoe pravo kak forma regulirovaniya social’nyh otnoshenii iemenskogo obshestva (Opyt polevogo issledovaniya naseleniya raiona ‘afi) [Customary law as a form of social regulation for Yemeni society (field research experience of the Afi district)]**, Dis. kand. sociol. nauk: SPb 2006.

15 O. Bobrus, **Vremennoi aspekt kategorial’noi ustanovki lichnosti [The Temporal Aspect of the Categorical Set of Personality]**, Dis. kand. psihol. nauk: Tomsk 2000.

16 M. Dzhangurazov, **Problema formirovaniya ekologicheskoi kul’tury narodov Severnogo Kavkaza [The problem of formation of the ecological culture of the peoples of the North Caucasus]**, Dis. kand. filos. nauk: Nal’chik 2003.

time and medieval world outlook”. “His profound knowledge of an antique philosophy and history, religious sciences, natural-science sights, and also historical realities and the state life of the different countries had allowed Ibn Khaldun to made generalizations which were applicable not only to the Muslim states, but also to understanding of policy as a whole. The theoretical science up to him did not reach similar peaks<sup>17</sup>.

*Use of ideas of Ibn Khaldun in teaching activities.* At the moment, the truth is that Ibn Khaldun’s legacy became less and less taught in schools and higher educational establishments in post-Soviet republics. The main reasons – saving of state money and practical orientation of education. They mean that education should be less expensive, and include only necessary for success in profession courses, so instead of previous 5-6 years devoted for higher education now in many post-Soviet republics most students have only 3-4 years. Because of that many subjects are cut out of the teaching program, and mostly this is social sciences and humanities. As, for example, says Professor Predborska “I’ve taught about Ibn Khaldun early in 1990-s, but now all our courses are cut out and I have no time to tell students about him” (personal communication, 18 February 2009). Ibn Khaldun’s legacy becoming subject for teaching mostly in specialized faculties, where students are preparing to become philosophers, historians or political scientists. But from time to time some aspects of his teaching are described in teaching courses devoted to different fields of knowledge. For example, he described as one of first researchers of corruption in teaching manual prepared for journalists in Irkutsk (Russia)<sup>18</sup>.

*Interpretation of life and ideas of Ibn Khaldun in CIS mass media.* We should mention that Ibn Khaldun got enough benevolent attention from the side of mass media in post-Soviet republics. Some pleasant words about him were in 2002 said in Russian popular journal “Nauka I zhizn”, where he described

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17 D. Fomina, **Vlast’ i gosudarstvo v filosofii Ibn Khalduna [Power and State in Philosophy of Ibn Khaldun]**, Dis. kand. filos. nauk: Moskva 2003.

18 G. I. Bobkova, **Molodye zhurnalisty protiv korrupcii [Young journalists oppose corruption]**. Irkutsk: Irkut. un-t, 2004.

as “first sociologist”<sup>19</sup>. In the journal “Mifoskop” Ibn Khaldun is mentioned as “glorious”<sup>20</sup>. In 2006 journals widely gave coverage to conference in Cairo devoted to 600 years to Ibn Khaldun’ death.

The main reason for high actuality of Ibn Khaldun’s teaching despite to centuries passed is his ability to understand nature of the human being. Civilization is developing, people are permanent part of the outer space and attended the moon, but their nature stayed without substantial changes. The role of elites becomes more and more powerful in spite of numerous declarations of success and promotion of democracy. The world became global and insights of Ibn Khaldun about the fate of any state due to elites’ greed that always is outside the framework of normal wants of human being turned out to be right for the world itself. Created by western countries global financial system repeated in short version all cycle he found right for any state – greed of elite undermines productive forces and economy is crashed. So one of important lessons of current global financial crisis is that nature of the human being stayed without changes during last six centuries and Ibn Khaldun is master in understanding of wishes and desires that makes people repeat the same mistakes in politics and economy again and again under different masks – monarchy or republic, dictatorship or democracy. All these masks are not more than cover for governing elites to concentrate abundant wealth contrary to needs of other members of society. It is interesting how the crush of the USSR negatively influenced on Western economy – western elites lost the fear of the socialist alternative in his face and became absolutely uninterested to preserve balance between their greed and interests of other unprivileged members of western societies, not mention the interests of people that live in non-western part of the world. Every year from the crush of the Soviet Union we witnessed the same story – how western elites opened the range between

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19 A. Grifel’, 2002 “Kordovskij meridian”, [“Cordoba meridian”], **Nauka I zhizn’ [Science and Life]**, no. 1, retrieved from <http://www.nkj.ru/archive/articles/3819/>.

20 S. Smirnov, **Sravnitel’noe zhizneopisanie narodov [Comparative biography of peoples]**, 2006, retrieved from <http://www.mifoskop.ru/hst02.html>.

them and usual people. When all wealth of the world became not enough for them they invented and legitimized new one – numerous forms of derivatives. When sum of derivatives became much more than real economy could tolerate the end was apparent.

In conclusion we could mention that Ibn Khaldun's interpretation and ideas playing important role in the developing of statehood at the post-Soviet space. They have numerous dimensions. Somewhere, as in countries with dominant Islamic population or in countries with substantial Islamic communities, Ibn Khaldun is important as symbol of blossom of knowledge in Islamic culture, father of many sciences, who was undeservingly forgotten in Western countries. For countries with striking corruption and differentiation of population he is important as the theorist who was able to predict dangers of these problems for preserving of statehood. Many of his ideas found its application in different modern theories, developed and adapted now at post-Soviet space. The world crisis is powerful impetus to read Ibn Khaldun's teaching over and over again to find approaches that will be more effective to restrain destructive greed of world elites to create more harmonious life for humankind.

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