

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

Al-Farabi's Doctrine on the Head of the Virtuous City in the Context of Contemporary Kazakhstan

Abū Naṣr al-Farabi is rightfully considered one of the greatest thinkers in the world whose teachings have always been and will remain relevant through all stages of human history. Al-Farabi's greatness lies in the fact that every man, nation, and state can find answers to their questions in their encyclopedic heritage and define a path of future development. When speaking about the role of philosophy in human life and society, the well-known Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov described al-Farabi as a ray of light in the dark labyrinths of the human path to the truth.

The philosophy of al-Farabi can be defined in the same terms. His philosophy has always remained modern, it is close to each of us, and offers solutions to the most challenging issues, especially today when human history has changed quite unpredictably. There is, hopefully, a way out of this crisis, and the philosophies of the great world thinkers, such as al-Farabi, will help overcome this situation.

This paper discusses the research into the legacy of al-Farabi in Kazakhstan. Mukhash Burabayev, the famous Kazakh researcher, claims that al-Farabi was widely known among the Kazakhs in previous centuries but his works in Arabic were available only to a selected few. During the Soviet regime, the Kazakhs were forced to change their alphabet first into Latin, then into Cyrillic, which could be considered a deliberate policy aimed at the destruction of the historical memory of Kazakhs. Fortunately, despite such harsh measures, Kazakhs were able to preserve their language, traditions, culture and rich spiritual heritage.

According to Burabayev, the eminent philosopher, historian, statesman and diplomat Kazybek Tauasaruly (1692–1776) thoroughly studied and translated many of al-Farabi's works, after spending about eight years in the Middle East (Burabayev, 1994, p. 18). Kazybek's book, which title translates as *From Ancient Times to My Life*, was written in 1776 but was published as late as in 1993, when Kazakhstan restored its political and spiritual independence. In his book, Kazybek calls al-Farabi a wise ancestor, emphasizes his social and ethical treatises but also acknowledges that al-Farabi's work on natural sciences was difficult to comprehend.

There is evidence that Kazybek bought some al-Farabi's works and brought them back to his homeland but, unfortunately, these books have been lost.

The 1920s saw a surge of interest in al-Farabi's legacy. For example, the famous politician Mustafa Chokai in his book on Turkestan under the Soviet power argues that the thoughts of al-Farabi on the origins of human society had a significant impact on the views of many European philosophers. The famous Kazakh poet Magzhan Zhumabayev, who fell victim to Soviet repressions in the 1930s, glorified al-Farabi's name in his poems. In one of these poems, written in the early 20th century and dedicated to Turan, ancient Turkestan, Zhumabayev describes the activities of great thinkers born in holy Turkestan and writes about Turkic music and al-Farabi's play on the Kazakh *domyra*.

The most informative and fruitful period in the study of al-Farabi's works started with the founding of the Institute of Philosophy and Law under the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan. In 1991, the al-Farabi researchers established a department of al-Farabi studies, which marked the stellar years in the history of "Farabiology" in our country. In these years, the monumental work of translating and publishing al-Farabi's works into the Kazakh and Russian languages was carried out. The greatest and most dedicated scholars worked at the department of al-Farabi studies. The department received significant state support for creating favorable work conditions and for publishing the books.

President of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, the internationally recognized scholar Kanysh Satpayev, played a major role in founding the school of al-Farabi. This wonderful time of true scientific creativity could be compared to the era of the collegium of Toledo in the Middle Ages.

Inspired by the brilliant idea of the renaissance of the heritage of al-Farabi, scholars such as Akzhan al-Mashany, Agyn Kassymzhanov, Mukash Burabayev, Boris Osherovich, Clara Tadzhiikova, Elena Kharenko, Anatoly Kenissarin, Saule Satybekova, Galiya Kurmangaliyeva and others translated and published several volumes of al-Farabi's works, among them *Philosophical Treatises* (1970), *Social and Ethical Treatises* (1973), *Treatises on Logic* (1975), *Mathematical Treatise* (1972), *Comments on Ptolemy's Almagest* (1975), *Historical and Philosophical Treatises* (1985), *Natural Science Treatises*, (1987) and *The Book on Music and Poetry* (1992).

Only today it is possible to comprehend the magnitude of the work accomplished by a relatively small group of scholars. Their dedicated work made al-Farabi's legacy available not only to Kazakhs but also in the entire Soviet Union. It should

be noted that the most systematic and scientific publication of his treatises was accomplished namely in Kazakhstan.

Galiya Kurmangaliyeva, the leading researcher of al-Farabi, argues that the work of these scholars made al-Farabi's name a symbol of the Kazakh culture, and al-Farabi's legacy—the Kazakh national heritage (Kurmangaliyeva, 2012, p. 19). Research into this legacy has gradually become the object of investigation in various scholarly fields. As a result, articles and monographs of famous scientists, not only philosophers but also linguists, historians and mathematicians have been published.

Another critical stage in the evolution of al-Farabi studies in Kazakhstan started with the restoration of the country's independence. New realities required new approaches in the study of the great thinker. The democratic changes in the society have given a new impetus for al-Farabi researchers who were much inspired by the opportunity to create freely and creatively without ideological dictates “from above”. The native language of Kazakhs was declared as the official state language, and new opportunities emerged for its development. New schools and universities, where Kazakhs could be taught in their own language, were established. Of course, the works of al-Farabi were translated into the Kazakh language so that everyone could study him in his native language.

The state program ‘Cultural Heritage’, initiated by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, became an impetus for the development of the studies of al-Farabi works. The works of many well-known representatives of the philosophical world, including al-Farabi, were translated into the Kazakh language within the framework of the single *Philosophy* series. As a result, a 10-volume collection of his works was published.

It should be emphasised that the collection includes al-Farabi's *Small syllogism used by the mutakallimun*, *Theology*, and *Analytics*, which have never been translated before. The legacy of Al-Farabi was also highlighted in separate volumes of the two cycles of the *Philosophy* series: *The philosophical heritage of the Kazakh people from ancient times to the present day* (20 volumes) and *World Philosophy* (20 volumes). Most importantly, his works have been translated into the Kazakh language from the original work. Thus, a new level of quality (substantially different from the ideological translations of the Soviet times) has been achieved.

The year 1993 marked an important event in Kazakhstan—the Kazakh National University, the largest university in Kazakhstan, was named after al-Farabi.

Another important milestone in the history of Kazakh al-Farabi studies was the publishing of the journal titled *Al-Farabi*. Since 2002, the journal which covers issues of philosophy, politics and religious studies has been published under the editorship of Galiya Kurmangaliyeva, a brilliant expert of al-Farabi's works, who has been head of the department of al-Farabi studies at the Institute of Philosophy and Political Science for many years. *Al-Farabi* is an engaging, easily comprehensible academic journal, which is aimed at shaping religious and ethical values and has played an enormous role in the popularization of al-Farabi's ideas. Today it is deservedly recognized as one of the most respected scientific publications in Kazakhstan and CIS and is included in the UNESCO catalogue.

The above academic achievements of al-Farabi researchers, as well as the support of the government, have popularized the name of al-Farabi among the Kazakh population today. Institutions of education and art, streets and avenues in the cities, including one of the major avenues of Almaty, are named after him.

The Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (the country's leading higher education institution and, listed by the QS World University Rankings among the top 300 universities in the world) continues the noble and very responsible task of studying the works of al-Farabi. The Al-Farabi Kazakh National University designed its mission to popularize and promote the ideas of the great thinker. The university carries out extensive work on strengthening the research center of al-Farabi, developing the al-Farabi museum, publishing his works, and organizing further scientific research within the framework of fundamental projects. Three volumes of the new edition of the series of philosophical treatises of al-Farabi have been published in three languages—Kazakh, Russian and English.

Another important step is the introduction of the specialized course 'Al-Farabi and the Modern Age' in the university curriculum. Under the leadership of the university rector, academician Galymkair Mutanov, researchers of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and the Institute of Philosophy have published a manual by the same name, which has become a handbook for students and anyone else interested in al-Farabi's philosophy.

In 2013, the university launched a research and innovation project 'Al-Farabi University Smart City' under the initiative of Rector Galymkair Mutanov. With his expert knowledge in philosophy, Mutanov drew attention to al-Farabi's doctrine of the virtuous city and chose it as a fundamental idea on this new project. As Galymkair Mutanov notes,

the smart city project is actively and successfully implemented in all developed countries, but it is understood purely in the sense of housing and community—in terms of quality of life of its citizens through the use of information and communication technologies. A specific nature of our idea of smart university is combining humanistic and technological platforms, the harmony of material and spiritual principles. In fact, the prototype of our smart city is the virtuous city presented in the treatises of al-Farabi as a just and humane society, the most important signs of which are spiritual values and cooperation in achieving the best possible life. (Mutanov, 2014)

The constant promotion of al-Farabi's ideas is necessary for the realization of his central idea of the virtuous city—the attainment of common happiness. It is necessary to ensure that the ideas reach each inhabitant of the city, striving for the virtuousness. The international Farabi Forum (under the direct supervision of Galymkair Mutanov), which was held for the third year in a row, pursues this aim.

Understanding the role of the ruler of the city is particularly important in the programme of the 'Al-Farabi University Smart City', as well as in al-Farabi's philosophy.

It is well known that the development of countries and nations is largely determined by the personality of the ruler, which is the reason why many philosophers are interested in the role of the state ruler.

For example, Plato believed that the ruler should be a philosopher seeking knowledge; he is honest, loving the truth and rejecting the lie, since he is the only one able to see an ordered and ideal existence with no place for injustice. The ancient philosopher argued that only this type of governor could change the course of history and the presence of such person in the community will ensure the achievement of yet unrealized ideas. According to Plato, the governor has a good memory, ability to learn, and is just, courageous and wise. (Nurysheva, 2004)

Elaborations on the teachings of Plato on the governor of the state can be found in al-Farabi's works. It should be noted that the crucial point of the whole system of al-Farabi is the provision stating that "the purpose of human existence is to achieve the highest happiness, which people can achieve only in the virtuous city and often under the guidance of a teacher and mentor" (Abai, 2014, p. 48). The virtuous city is different from all other human societies since it is an association

of people aimed at mutual assistance in actions with which true happiness can be attained. Self-isolation and loneliness cannot make a man happy. Interestingly, a Kazakh proverb, which says that “the light of a man can be found with another man”, means almost exactly the same.

Al-Farabi’s virtuous city is based on hierarchy. Hierarchy involves not only the relation of domination and subordination but also harmony and balance. The hierarchy reflects the objectiveness of cosmic order, a reflection of which can be found in the reality of Earth’s order. Al-Farabi believed that life on Earth is a reflection of the wonderful harmony of the cosmos since the laws of social development are related to the eternal laws of existence. According to al-Farabi, it is impossible to build a perfect society without knowing the mysteries of the world harmony.

Who should be the ruler of a virtuous city? Another interesting idea of al-Farabi is that people are divided into leaders and followers. Not everyone has the ability to lead. Anyone who is always able to accomplish anything he is assigned to do will never be the leader. Nevertheless, if that person is able to study and learn, he might acquire the ability to lead another person, while simultaneously being led by yet another person. He is called the second ruler, and, according to al-Farabi, this kind of leadership can be applied in agriculture, trade, and other sectors of the city.

The head of the city, in its absolute meaning, is the one who does not need to be governed. This man has excellent natural qualities; his soul is connected with an active mind and the people governed by such leader who live together and are united by a common place of residence, are the most virtuous, superior and happy people. In modern language, such heads of the city are called leaders. They have always played and continue to play a decisive role in the history of humanity owing to their logical and creative thinking, courage and high moral principles.

The head of the city, according to al-Farabi, should possess special leadership qualities, which, in turn, are divided into innate and acquired ones. Al-Farabi presents the acquired qualities of the head of the virtuous city through his ability to connect with an active intelligence with the help of the power of imagination or acquired intellect. He notes that the good deeds and statements of the head do not come from him, but are counselled by active intellect.

Al-Farabi mentions the difficulty of finding the combination of all these qualities in one person since people gifted with such traits are extremely rare.

He also believed that the members of the city differ from each other the same way than the organs of one body differ in their nature and abilities. Similarly to the hierarchy in the body that terminates at the organs which do not rule but only obey, the state hierarchy ends with the social class whose only responsibility lies in subordination and execution of orders.

Al-Farabi compares the head of the virtuous city with the heart—the main organ of the human body. The heart is the cause of the existence and location of other certain organs of the body. If any of the body organs comes to disorder, life in the whole body will not stop, but if the heart fails, the person dies. Al-Farabi considered the heart as a concept closely related to the concept of soul, and not only physiologically, but also philosophically. A person manifests his spiritual world through his heart, and because of his heart he communicates with other people, with the society, nature and God. Al-Farabi attributes to the heart all the functions of consciousness: thinking, will, sensation, expression of love and conscience. Moreover, the heart is the center of life—physical, spiritual, and mental. It is the source of human experience: it can be a source of love and hatred, heat and cold. If it is opposed to God, then it is “petrified” and “grows cold”. Abai, the great Kazakh thinker, supports this idea. In his philosophical *Words of Edification*, he wrote: “Will, mind and heart [...] You should unite around the heart and obey it [...]. I will give preference to the heart if you do not come to an agreement.” (Abai, 2014, p. 48)

Continuing this line of thought on the virtuous city, we can note that al-Farabi compares the head of the virtuous city with the Supreme Being because it brings the same order and harmony in the management of the city that the Supreme Being contributes to the world harmony. As noted above, for al-Farabi, the unity of knowledge and action is the ideal—knowledge about true happiness and actions in accordance with this knowledge. Therefore, one of the tasks of the head of the city is to guide the citizens to committing acts that lead to the achievement of happiness. Guiding the citizens of the virtuous city to happiness starts with education, strengthening and preserving the virtues in the souls of citizens, as virtues (as well as vices) are assigned as a result of frequent repetition. It should be noted that this task, entrusted to the head of the virtuous city, assumes knowledge of the human soul.

As and when necessitated, the head of the virtuous city should rule in accordance to two rules: the method of persuasion, which is in the first place, and compulsion, which is to be applied against the rebellious and disobedient citizens who are not voluntarily impelled to prudence. The head of the virtuous city should manage

people with love because this, in return, inspires a reciprocal feeling from the people. In this state, a person is capable of creativity, the achievement of heights in any activity.

The head of the virtuous city should follow the principle of fairness in the distribution of (material and moral) wealth. Al-Farabi associates justice with the categories of “middle” and “moderation”. This interpretation of justice is from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Justice, according to al-Farabi, is not equality—instead, it is getting such share of the wealth which corresponds to his position or merit. With such qualities, the head of the virtuous city, of course, is a model for imitation by other members of the city.

According to al-Farabi, the first and most important quality of the head of the virtuous city is to have “absolutely perfect organs, the energies of which are so well-adapted to carry out the actions they have to perform that if this person decides to take any action using any organ, he will be able to do it easily” (Al-Farabi, 1994a, p. 221). In other words, the head of state must have good health. As a Kazakh proverb says, “The first wealth is health”.

Additionally, al-Farabi emphasizes that the head of the virtuous city “should naturally be able to perfectly understand and imagine all that is said, reflecting all that is spoken in accordance to what he has in mind; should be able to preserve well in his memory all that he knows, sees, hears without forgetting anything” (Al-Farabi, 1994a, p. 221). This, according to al-Farabi, is the quality of a perfect mind.

Al-Farabi notes that the ruler should “have an expressive style and be able to state clearly all that he conceives; have a love for learning and knowledge, reaching them easily without any fatigue from training nor pangs from work” (Al-Farabi, 1994a, p. 221). Another quality of the head of the city that al-Farabi stresses is “to show determination in the accomplishment of what he considers necessary while being bold, brave, and without any fear and cowardice” (Al-Farabi, 1994a, p. 221).

Al-Farabi notes that the head “must naturally love justice and its advocates [...] to indemnify the victims of injustice, giving all that he considers good and beautiful” (Al-Farabi, 1994a, p. 221).

It is essential to note that al-Farabi compares the head of the city with a person who has the power to “treat the soul” (Al-Farabi, 1994b, p. 267). A doctor treating the body and a statesman who heals the soul serve different functions. For example, the doctor treats hands only to make a person able to use objects

with the hands. He is not interested in what actions—good or evil—will this man do. Al-Farabi notes that the statesman and the ruler should

know the entire soul, its parts, its limitations and deficiencies that contaminate the soul and its parts, and the reasons of contamination; he needs to know those states of mind in which a person conducts right actions; how to eliminate the shortcomings of urban residents; what skillful techniques we must use to achieve the strength [of virtue] in the hearts of the citizens, and know the way to always keep them [these virtues] there (Al-Farabi, 1994b, p. 267).

These requirements to the head of the city seem very reasonable. A modern ruler at any level should have an excellent knowledge both of the health of the body of each of the citizen and his soul, and should be able to recognize and treat their illnesses in time. He has to manage the affairs of every part of his city regardless of the size of the city. In modern parlance, the head should be aware of all the affairs taking place in his city.

Though the city is composed of different buildings that have different goals, he should strive to do something that brings benefit to all the residents; only then will the city function safely and its citizens, led by their wise ruler, will reach their noble goal, which is happiness. These words can be attributed to the Kazakh University and the Kazakh society as a whole.

To summarize this analysis of the doctrine of the head of the city, it is evident that al-Farabi establishes a close connection between human happiness and the establishment of the human association. He is sure that happiness is attainable if it is well planned, and people's lives are directed wisely. This perfectly planned human association is the virtuous city itself.

In the 21st century, unfortunately, there are still people, whom al-Farabi refers to as ignorant, engaged in wars and bloodshed, injustice and cruelty. An ignorant person cannot live in harmony with the environment, with people or with himself. These ideas are still relevant today—after more than a thousand years after al-Farabi's death. Most people do not think about the meaning and purpose of life and lead automatic lives: get an education, profession, family, make a career. Still, does it all make a modern man happy?

Undoubtedly, the doctrine of al-Farabi on the virtuous city and its head is very important today. All should agree that the pursuit of happiness is the goal of each of our contemporaries, humanity as a whole. What is the meaning of true

happiness, how to achieve it, and who should be the head of the city, who can show us the way to achieve the highest happiness; what should the society of people united by a common purpose look? Is it all possible? The desire to find answers has formed the basis of the 'Al-Farabi University Smart City' project.

The university indeed drew attention to the one-sided approach of the creation of contemporary smart cities, which is often associated with the creation of comfortable living conditions by means of science and technology. This results in a poorer meaning and concept of the smart city. New technologies have come to prevail and are outrunning the spiritual and moral development of humanity. Non-compliance of the moral levels of society with its level of technical development will sooner or later lead humanity to disaster.

The current situation requires a new vision of the formation of the moral values that are adequate to modern trends in the development of the society. Becoming aware of this problem has inspired the university to develop a research and innovation project called 'Al-Farabi University Smart City'. In the 21st century, the state of university cities is not only determined by the availability of infrastructure, financial and material resources. Modern universities should have a high level of moral development and should intend to provide special intelligent cities, promote the creation of cultural values of the nation. The project 'Al-Farabi University Smart City' is aimed at creating a modern university where the two main principles—the technological and the moral activity—are developed in harmony.

This synergy allows a transition to a fundamentally new quality of a university city—to the city that is creating new approaches to the development of modern society.

We surely understand the difficulty of building a virtuous city, which is very small in relation to the size of the country and the world overall. The work on the implementation of this project, i.e., its components 'Sanctify the world around yourself!', '100 books', 'The cult of the healthy body', 'Green Campus', etc., is already yielding positive results. The management of the university, following the ideas of al-Farabi, imposes strict requirements on the heads of mini-cities—the various structures of the university. The future of the virtuous city depends on their personal characteristics, on the level of concordance with the characteristics of the head of the city.

It can be concluded that the philosophical doctrine of al-Farabi remains relevant at all times of the evolution of the human society and every modern man can find answers in the works of al-Farabi to his concerns on all issues of social development as well as his individuality.

References

- Abai** (2014), *Slova nazidaia* [Words of edification], Almaty.
- Al-Farabi** (1994a), 'O kachestvakh glavy dobrodetelnogo goroda' [About the qualities of the head of the virtuous city], in *Al-Farabi: Izbrannye Traktaty* [Al-Farabi: Selected treatises], Almaty: Gylym, pp. 220–223.
- Al-Farabi** (1994b), 'Aforizmy gosudarstvennogo deiatelia,' [Aphorisms of the statesman], part 1, in *Al-Farabi: Izbrannye Traktaty* [Al-Farabi: Selected treatises], Almaty: Gylym, pp. 266–294.
- Burabayev, M. B.** (1994), 'Vydaiushchisia myslitel srednevekovia Abu Nasr al-Farabi' [Outstanding medieval philosopher Abu Nasr Al-Farabi], in *Al-Farabi: Izbrannye Traktaty* [Al-Farabi: Selected treatises], Almaty: Gylym, pp. 5–28.
- Kurmangaliyeva, G. K.** (2012), 'Al-Farabi v kazakhstanskoi filosofii: nastoiashchee i perspektivy budushchego' [Al-Farabi in the Kazakh philosophy: the present state and future prospects], in Z. K. Shaukenova (ed.) *Tvorchestvo al-Farabi v sotsiokulturnom izmerenii vostoka i zapada* [Proceedings of the round table 'Creativity of Al-Farabi in the socio-cultural dimension of the East and the West'], Almaty: IFPR KN MON RK, pp. 18–27.
- Mutanov, G. M. et al.** (2014), *Al-Farabi i sovremennost* [Al-Farabi and the modern age], Alma-ata: Kazakh universitet.
- Nurysheva, G. Zh.** (2004), *History of Philosophy*, Almaty.

**Gaukhar Konayeva, Gulzhikhan Nurysheva, Zhamilya Amirkulova,
Aliya Ramazanova and Karlygash Mukhtarova**

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan