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THE KAZAKH DIASPORA DURING THE PERIOD OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EXPERIMENTS IN MONGOLIA (1920S–1950S) AND THEIR IMPACT ON REGIONAL RELATIONS BETWEEN MONGOLIA AND KAZAKHSTAN

Salima OMASH,^I Kalybek KOBLANDIN,^{II} Aigerim OSPANOVA^{III}

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ABSTRACT

The Kazakh Diaspora During the Period of Social and Political Experiments in Mongolia (1920s–1950s) and Their Impact on Regional Relations Between Mongolia and Kazakhstan

This study explores the migration and adaptation of the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia during the twentieth century, focusing on the sociopolitical impacts of Soviet policies, collectivization, and repression. The research uses demographic data from historical censuses, archival documents, and recent surveys for 1926–1959. The findings reveal a significant migration of Kazakhs to Mongolia, driven by factors such as famine, political repression, and the search for stability. Despite these challenges, the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia preserved its cultural identity through active integration into Mongolian society, while maintaining connections with Kazakhstan. The study concludes that the Kazakh diaspora remains a key factor in fostering positive bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Mongolia, with implications for cultural, educational, and political cooperation.

KEYWORDS: collectivization, repression, cultural identity, census, traditions

IZVLEČEK

Kazaška diaspora v obdobju socialnih in političnih eksperimentov v Mongoliji (1926–1959) ter njihov vpliv na regionalne odnose med Mongolijo in Kazahstanom

Avtorji v študiji preučujejo migracije in prilagajanje kazaške diaspore v Mongoliji v 20. stoletju, pri čemer se osredotočajo na družbenopolitične vplive sovjetskih politik, kolektivizacije in represije. Pri raziskavi uporabljajo demografske podatke iz zgodovinskih popisov prebivalstva, arhivske dokumente in novejša raziskave, s poudarkom na obdobju med letoma 1926 in 1959. Ugotovitve raziskave kažejo

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na precej obsežne migracije Kazahov v Mongolijo, ki so bile posledica dejavnikov, kot so lakota, politična represija in želja po stabilnosti. Kljub tem izzivom je kazaška diaspora v Mongoliji ohranila svojo kulturno identiteto, tako da se je na eni strani aktivno vključila v mongolsko družbo, hkrati pa je ohranila povezave s Kazahstanom. Avtorji ugotavljajo, da je kazaška diaspora še vedno ključni dejavnik za pozitivne dvostranske odnose med Kazahstanom in Mongolijo, ki vpliva na sodelovanje na kulturnem, izobraževalnem in političnem področju.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kolektivizacija, represija, kulturna identiteta, popis prebivalstva, tradicije

INTRODUCTION

A detailed study of the Kazakhs living in compact communities in Mongolia is crucial for understanding both the historical context and the preconditions, as well as the current situation in relations between Kazakhstan and Mongolia. Compact settlement is a situation where representatives of a particular ethnic, national, or cultural group live concentrated, that is, densely and in significant numbers, in a particular territory within another state. The study of the processes of migration and adaptation of ethnic minorities in non-standard sociopolitical conditions assessed how these communities function under the influence of external factors. Such a study is relevant in the current context of globalization, during active integration and assimilation processes for small cultures and ethnic groups.

The Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia played a pivotal role in the development of Kazakh–Mongolian relations, serving as a bridge between the two nations. Despite facing multiple political regimes, from Tsarist Russia to the Soviet Union, and even under Mongolia's socialist transformation, the Kazakh diaspora managed to preserve its cultural identity while actively engaging in Mongolia's sociopolitical fabric. The integration of Kazakhs into Mongolian society was facilitated by policies that promoted multiethnic cooperation during the socialist era, allowing Kazakhs to participate in political, cultural, and educational processes in their native language. This helped maintain their cultural heritage while also strengthening bilateral ties with Kazakhstan. The diaspora's contributions were particularly evident in the shared cultural practices, such as the celebration of Nauryz (the Kazakh form of Nowruz), and in the political sphere, where Kazakh citizens of Mongolia actively participated in governance, including parliamentary elections. Through these interactions, the Kazakh diaspora has not only preserved its identity but has also enriched Mongolian society, contributing to the development of a mutual understanding and long-lasting relations between Kazakhstan and Mongolia.

The Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia during the 1920s to 1950s was a significant subject of research that elucidated the effects of socialist experiments on ethnic minorities in Central Asia. In the context of globalization and the revival of interest in national history and culture, the study of the historical experience of the Kazakh

diaspora in Mongolia is particularly important. Understanding how the Kazakh diaspora adapted to socialist changes and how these changes affected relations between Mongolia and Kazakhstan helps define current challenges and ways of addressing them. Analyzing the interaction between these countries through the prism of the historical experience of the Kazakh diaspora opens new perspectives for understanding the impact of politics on ethnic and international relations in Central Asia.

The Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia has attracted significant academic interest, particularly regarding the sociopolitical factors that have shaped its formation and persistence. Baizhuma and Dukenbaeva (2021) examine the mass repression in Mongolia during the early to mid-twentieth century, highlighting the tragic fate of Kazakhs who were forced to migrate due to political upheavals. Their work, while important for documenting the repression, could be further expanded by exploring how these traumatic experiences shaped the long-term identity of the Kazakh community in Mongolia, particularly in shaping the cultural dynamics between Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

Tokishkadyrov et al. (2023) focus on individual historical figures from the 1920s and 1930s who sought refuge in Mongolia while maintaining their spiritual and cultural ties to Kazakhstan. This exploration provides valuable insights into the personal resilience and cultural continuity of the diaspora, but it remains largely anecdotal. A more comprehensive approach could involve analyzing how these figures contributed to the broader sociopolitical and cultural landscapes of both Kazakhstan and Mongolia, thereby bridging the gap between individual historical experiences and the diaspora's collective memory.

Aigerim's (2021) work on the creation of Bayan-Ulgii autonomy in 1940 offers an important perspective on the role of political autonomy in preserving Kazakh identity in Mongolia. This autonomy was crucial for the spiritual and economic development of the Kazakh community, enabling them to maintain their language, customs, and cultural practices. However, Aigerim's analysis could be expanded to address the broader implications of this autonomy for Kazakhstan–Mongolia relations, as well as the role of the diaspora as an intermediary in fostering diplomatic ties between the two nations.

Mamytkanov and Kadyrolla (2021) argue that the return of Kazakhs from Mongolia and China to Kazakhstan is essential for understanding the demographic and social consequences of migration. Their work underscores the significance of this migration in the context of modern Kazakhstan's development. However, despite numerous studies on repatriation, Tokishkadirov et al. (2023) raise an important question: why has the Kazakh diaspora abroad not significantly decreased, even with favorable conditions for repatriation? This query opens up further avenues for investigation, particularly regarding the sociopolitical and cultural factors that influence the decision to remain in Mongolia despite the opportunity to return.

In summary, while these studies collectively contribute valuable insights into the historical experiences of Kazakhs in Mongolia, they would benefit from a more critical analysis of the gaps in understanding the diaspora's current role in strengthening Kazakh–Mongolian relations and preserving cultural identity across generations.

The study also aimed to identify the main historical events that contributed to the migration of Kazakhs to Mongolia, estimate the number of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan and Mongolia in the twentieth century, and examine the development of social and economic relations between the countries in 1920–1950.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the study, data from the First General Census of the Russian Empire in the eastern region of Kazakhstan (Troinitsky, 1904) were used for a demographic analysis. Additionally, the study used the monograph by Aubakirova et al. (2023), which provides information on the number and percentage of Kazakhs in regions closest to Mongolia based on the 1926, 1939, and 1959 censuses. The number of Kazakhs in Mongolia in 1950 was also studied (Bayantor et al., 2004). Understanding the number of Kazakhs in the twenty-first century was made possible by the 2020 Mongolian population census (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2020), as well as by information in the *Common core document forming an integral part of the reports of States parties: International human rights instruments: Mongolia* (Mongolia, 2013).

The inaccuracies in the 1937 census were investigated through content analysis of the media (Aronova, 2024). Barcus and Werner (2007) defined the geographical features of Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and the northern regions of China, particularly Xinjiang. Different estimates of the number of Kazakhs living in Mongolia were also reported, both in general and in specific regions (Alexander, 2010; Omash & Koblandin, 2024). The reasons for the mass migration of Kazakhs to Mongolia were analyzed by the Mongolian Institute of Innovation Policy (Mendee et al., 2022). Amanbekova et al. (2023) studied the mass famine in Kazakhstan, or Asharshylyk, and its sociopolitical and economic consequences.

Given the specifics of the research topic, the details of mass repressions in Mongolia in 1930 were studied (Mayer, 2023). On this basis, Kaplonski (2002) analyzed the repressions against Kazakhs in Mongolia. The comparison of differences in the number of Kazakhs in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag (administrative–territorial unit of Mongolia) in the works of authors from 2000 to 2010 (Barcus & Werner, 2007), the Association of North East Asia Regional Governments (2021), and newer works (Barcus & Shugatai, 2021) was also important for the study. The reasons for the active nomadism from the northern Chinese provinces to Mongolia, and vice versa, were discussed in a news report by the Mongolian media (Erdenebat, 2022). Other studies include the development of industry in Kazakhstan (Brover & Erofeev, 1957) and

a document on trade between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Mongolia (Political Bureau, 1932).

The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the migration patterns, cultural integration, and sociopolitical impact of the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia. Quantitative analysis drew on historical census materials—especially the 1897 First General Census of the Russian Empire (published in 1904) and subsequent censuses (1926, 1939, 1959)—to track demographic change over time, with particular attention to discrepancies in the 1937 census data. These datasets, together with monographs and demographic estimates (Aubakirova et al., 2023; Bayantor et al., 2004), were critically examined to assess Kazakh migration to Mongolia, especially during the 1930s famine and periods of sociopolitical upheaval. Qualitative methods, including content analysis of media reports and historical documents (Aronova, 2024; Mayer, 2023), were employed to explore the sociopolitical and cultural integration of Kazakhs in Mongolia, particularly in relation to mass repressions and the formation of Bayan-Ulgii autonomy. This structured approach, integrating both statistical analysis and historical narrative, provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing migration and identity preservation within the Kazakh diaspora.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the establishment of Soviet rule, migration intensified due to the totalitarian policies of the USSR, including collectivization and mass deportations. These political measures, combined with the widespread famine of the 1930s, caused the death of thousands of Kazakhs and led to a significant demographic shift in the region. The famine, which primarily affected Kazakhstan, displaced many Kazakhs, particularly from the country’s eastern regions. As a result, the ethnic composition in these areas changed dramatically. For instance, Mongolia’s proximity to Kazakhstan provided a refuge for many Kazakhs, who migrated in large numbers to escape the famine and Soviet repression. This migration had a profound impact on the demographic landscape of both Kazakhstan and Mongolia, with the number of Kazakhs in eastern Kazakhstan declining sharply (Table 1).

	1926	1939	1959
Kazakh	53.0%	27.6%	25.9%
Russians	34.7%	60.6%	60.2%

Table 1: Percentage composition of the population of Eastern Kazakhstan (source: compiled by the authors based on Aubakirova et al., 2023).

The divergence was particularly pronounced in the regions that suffered from the 1933 famine. Statisticians explained this by overestimating the 1926 census data, by

emigration, and by undercounting of deaths. Initially, the Russian Empire's expansionist activities led to the resettlement of many Kazakhs to the east. Mostly, Kazakh tribes moved to the highlands of the Tien Shan and to the northwestern regions of China, where they continued their usual way of life. However, the Manchus soon began to exert pressure on Kazakh tribes, as the region was of great importance to the Qing Dynasty rulers as a buffer zone protecting China from foreign intervention (Omash & Koblandin, 2024).

The Kazakh population is a small share of Mongolia's total population, but as the largest minority group, they occupy a special place in the cultural landscape, especially in western Mongolia. The *Common Core Document*, which is part of the reports of the States parties to the United Nations (Mongolia, 2013), noted that Mongolia's population is homogeneous, consisting of Mongols, except for small groups of Kazakh or Turkic origin. In the context of the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia, Post (2020) noted that in the Bayan-Ulgii aimag, which is only 40 km from the border with Kazakhstan, local herders are abandoning Mongolian names and establishing their own Kazakh names for places they frequent (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The geographical proximity of the Bayan-Ulgii aimag to the eastern territories of Kazakhstan (source: Mendee et al., 2022).

Alexander (2010) reported that approximately 1,370 ethnic Kazakhs lived in Mongolia in 1905. By 1923, the census recorded 1,870 families of Kazakh origin in the Mongolian region of Khovd, according to Omash and Koblandin (2024). Given an average family size of 4–5 people, the number of Kazakhs in Khovd was estimated at

7,000–11,000. This number continued to grow, and by 1989, the Kazakh population in Mongolia had reached approximately 125,500 (Barcus & Werner, 2007).

Kazakhs also live on the northwestern edge of China, in Xinjiang, which borders both modern Kazakhstan and Mongolia (Troinitsky, 1904). Given that the Kazakhs are a steppe-nomadic people, it is reasonable to assume that, during the period from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, they were free to roam between the Xinjiang region and Mongolia. The massive scale of Kazakh migration to the border countries is explained by the fact that, after 1990, there was a large return, as at least 10% of Kazakhstan's current population are immigrants and repatriates from various Asian border countries (Nowicka, 2020).

Researchers at the Mongolian Institute of Innovation Policy presented information on the migration of Kazakhs to Mongolia. In the nineteenth century, Kazakh nomads migrated to Mongolia to escape repression and high taxes in Qing China, as well as the oppression of the Tsarist Russian Empire. In 1912, the Kazakhs were recognized as citizens of Mongolia and later participated in the Mongolian People's Revolution of 1921. In 1922, they were granted citizenship and a place to live. In 1930, Mongolia issued a resolution to improve the living conditions of Kazakhs and Tuvans in the western regions (Mendee et al., 2022).

As described above, one of the most important and tragic events in the history of Kazakhstan was the mass famine, known as the Asharshylyk. The policy of sedentarization of the nomadic people of Kazakhstan led not only to famine and mass deaths, according to various estimates from 1 to 3 million people, but also to a significant resettlement of Kazakhs to China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey (Satpayev, 2020). In the context of Kazakhs living in Mongolia, it is also worth mentioning that in the late 1930s, mass repressions were carried out in Mongolia, during which thousands of people were killed and monasteries were destroyed (Mayer, 2023). Kaplonski (2002) noted that the killings in the socialist period of Mongolia began in the 1920s and continued until 1985, but they peaked in the late 1930s. Then, in a short period of less than 2 years, 22,000 people were killed. The author adds that the victims came from all walks of life, including Kazakhs. About 18,000 of the murdered were Buddhist lamas, while others were political and academic figures, representatives of science and the nobility, but also shepherds, cattle breeders, and workers (Aronova, 2024). Since the spring of 1937, Mongolian party activists, with the direct intervention of internal affairs officers, have compiled a secret list. Among the detained Kazakhs were major mullahs (Muslim clergy and religious leaders), wealthy people, judges, and government activists. In 1937–1938, 3,270 Kazakhs were shot as political punishment (Kozgambaeva & Kalysh, 2014).

In the postwar years, the Mongolian government began implementing political, economic, and social changes by force, which increased unrest and anxiety among the Kazakhs. In 1938, after some Kazakh intellectuals were labelled as enemies of the revolution and executed, the attack on political freedom, personal property, the people's religion, and national traditions of the Kazakh people could not help but

concern the people (Amanbekova et al., 2023). Because court cases in the region were conducted in the Mongolian language, some Kazakhs were unable to express their thoughts fully and were therefore tried. The work of political propaganda was incomprehensible to the people. The central government established a representative office tasked with translating these conditions into Kazakh and bringing them to the people. In a resolution, it instructed the local administration to prevent the prohibition of Kazakh religious customs and traditions. However, the consequences of this event were serious for the Kazakhs living in the area near the border with China. They had been under surveillance by the security services for many years, and many people joined the ranks of the unreliable. Some of those deemed politically unreliable were exiled to the interior of the region (Kozgambaeva & Kalysh, 2014).

During the period of rapid industrialization of Soviet Kazakhstan, the Mongolian government had little to offer the Soviet authorities. In the period 1920–1950, all of Mongolia's foreign trade went to the USSR. Bradsher (1972) pointed out that, similarly to the USSR, Mongolia launched a five-year development plan, but it was unsuccessful due to the slaughter of cattle by nomads, including local Kazakhs. The USSR government's socioeconomic policy led to outcomes similar to those in Kazakhstan. Collectivization made cattle breeding impossible, as the herds then exhausted the scarce vegetation of the limited pasture areas where they were grazed, as Ballis (1956) mentioned.

By 1940, Kazakhstan had become one of the most industrialized countries in the world. The most developed industries were fuel, textiles, clothing, leather, food, printing, non-ferrous metals, and electrical equipment (Erdenebat, 2022). Given this, as well as Kazakhstan's geographical proximity to Mongolia, a large share of goods exported from the USSR to Mongolia could have originated in Kazakhstan. The USSR exported to Mongolia petrol, iron, steel, electrical products, auto parts, flour and many food products, cotton fabrics, thread, wool, and leather shoes (Political Bureau, 1932). Local Kazakh literature also developed in the territory of Mongolia. In the 1940s and 1950s, Mukhamadiuly (works such as *Jut* and *Two Friends*), Dike-yuly (*To a Peer, A Dream Come True*), and Zhumanuly (*Daughters of the Kobda River, To My Family in Kazakhstan*) became famous writers. In 1959, Ulaanbaatar hosted the Decade of Kazakh Literature and Art of Mongolia (Ayagan, 2005).

In 1940, a new province for the Kazakhs, Bayan-Ulgii aimag, was established, although Uryan Khai Mongols also lived there. The Mongolian government defined the new aimag as a semi-autonomous region. Barcus and Werner (2007) noted that the region is almost 88.7% Kazakh and that school education is available in both Mongolian and Kazakh, unlike in other regions of Mongolia, where the language of instruction is exclusively Mongolian. According to the Association of North East Asian Regional Governments (2021), the same 88.7% of the region's population was Kazakh, with the rest being Urunkhai, Dorwood, and Tuvan. A more recent study by Barcus and Shugatai (2021) found that Kazakhs accounted for almost 88.6% of the total population of the Bayan-Ulgii region in 2015.

The Mongolian authorities adopted Soviet-style internationalization and followed the Soviet principle of building a multiethnic society. With the start of the revolution in 1921, the Communist Party attracted politically active Kazakhs by allowing them to participate in decision-making within both its organization and the Great People's Hural, which guaranteed their representation (Brover & Erofeev, 1957). In 1942, the party school began accepting Kazakh students and organizing Kazakh-language courses for them. By 1947, Kazakh ethnic minorities were able to attend Mongolian universities. In 1933, a Kazakh literacy program was implemented, and the first Kazakh school was opened, offering education in the native language (Mendee et al., 2022).

The resolution of the Small Khural provided for the restoration of local governance among the Kazakhs through democratic elections and the resolution of several issues, including land and cultural and educational aspects (Kozgambaeva & Kalysh, 2014). This included expanding schools, conducting educational activities in Kazakh, introducing separate rules for Kazakh administrative units (khoshuns and sumy), and publishing books in Kazakh. Particular attention was paid to training national personnel among the Kazakhs, underscoring the desire to preserve and develop their cultural identity. These measures led to the restoration of Kazakh hoshuns and sumins, as well as to the removal from the agenda of the policy of combating the peculiarities of Kazakh life and preserving Kazakh identity within the state system.

Moreover, Kazakhs in Mongolia had access to Kazakh newspapers and magazines in the early 1940s, and later to radio and television broadcasts (Mendee et al., 2022). As a result, the Kazakhs were integrated into the socialist political process and were granted the right to education and information in Kazakh. Due to the similarities in the cultural and economic life of the Kazakhs and Mongols, special ties were established between Kazakhstan and Mongolia. Immediately after the formation of Bayan-Ulgii aimag, the USSR government began sending doctors, veterinarians, and teachers from Kazakhstan to the region. From 1943, Mongolian Kazakhs began studying at institutes, colleges, and vocational schools in Kazakhstan. They received education in the USSR and other socialist bloc countries, with the same standards applied to them as to Mongolian citizens. All graduates of domestic and foreign educational institutions were sent to work in Mongolian villages and could be transferred to various departments only at the party's and relevant ministries' discretion (Mendee et al., 2022). Bolat (2016) also highlighted the establishment of national cultural and artistic centers and the opening of schools that provided education in Kazakh, as key initiatives for preserving Kazakh culture in Mongolia.

In addition, Kazakhs in Mongolia were subject to the same military duties as other ethnic groups living in the country, and they actively participated in the defense and military service throughout the twentieth century. Between 1934 and 1954, Kazakhs served in various capacities within the Mongolian People's Army, contributing significantly to the defense of their homeland. Some of the most

notable figures include Mazimula, a celebrated Kazakh hero, and General and Pilot Zaisanov, both of whom played prominent roles during the Khalkhyn–Gol battles, a key conflict between Mongolia and Japan in 1939. These figures are widely recognized and honored in Mongolia for their bravery and sacrifices.

Today, all Kazakh citizens of Mongolia aged 18 to 27 are required to serve in the military, just like other Mongolian citizens. Military service remains an essential aspect of citizenship, reflecting the integration of the Kazakh community into Mongolia's national defense system. The participation of Kazakhs in the Mongolian military is not only a legal obligation but also a matter of national pride, given their historical contributions to Mongolia's security and sovereignty.

In summary, the development of the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia, especially after a series of uprisings in Xinjiang and other internal political crises within China, as well as after the political repressions that took place in the USSR between 1930 and 1950, had a profound impact on the region. This period marked a time of repression and forced exodus, which led to significant migration of Kazakhs to neighboring countries, including Mongolia. The political repression that occurred in Kazakhstan at this time was the result of Stalin's policies and included the forced collectivization of agriculture and the elimination of the ethnic identification of the Kazakhs. As a result, the indigenous population of Kazakhstan was deported to Siberia, while others were sent to labor camps or executed. Many Kazakhs in the northeastern and central regions of Kazakhstan made the difficult decision to leave their homes and seek refuge in Mongolia through China. Mongolia, as a neighboring country with similar economic activities and culture, offered a realistic option for those seeking to escape repression and preserve their Kazakh identity. As Daukeyeva (2024) notes, the creation of semi-autonomy within Mongolia contributed to the preservation of the Kazakh language and cultural traditions.

The establishment and growth of the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia have had a significant impact on the region in various ways. First, it has enriched Mongolia's cultural diversity. Kazakhs have brought their unique customs, traditions, and language, which have added to the country's multicultural picture and palette structure. This cultural exchange has not only enriched Mongolian society but also provided an opportunity to preserve Kazakh culture and identity outside of their historical homeland. Among the Kazakhs of Mongolia are well-known scientists, doctors, poets, writers, cultural, and sports figures.

Second, the Kazakh diaspora has contributed to Mongolia's economic development. Many Kazakhs have brought valuable skills and knowledge that have proved useful across various industries in Mongolia. They have played a crucial role in agriculture, mining, livestock, and trade, thereby further contributing to the region's economic development. For example, the Mongolian city of Erdenet is one of the centers of industrial integration, uniting other regions of Mongolia. Since 1970, the population of Mongolia has been actively migrating to work in heavy industry, including Kazakhs (Smith, 2020). In addition, the presence of the Kazakh diaspora

has strengthened and expanded socioeconomic, cultural, and humanitarian ties between Mongolia and Kazakhstan. Despite the difficulties, the Kazakhs of Mongolia managed to preserve their ethnic identity, including their language, traditions, and customs. This ensured the continuity of their cultural heritage and prevented the Kazakh community from assimilating into Mongolian society.

Mongolia and Kazakhstan do not share a common border, as a 47–60 km strip of Russian mountainous territory lies between them. Geographically and politically, Bayan-Ulgii and Khovd are remote regions in the interior of Mongolia. The only land route from Mongolia to Kazakhstan goes through Russia, making a 900 km detour.

Language and religion are the two main cultural differences between Kazakhs and Mongols. Kazakh is a Turkic language and the main language spoken in Bayan-Ulgii. Most Kazakhs in Mongolia also speak Mongolian, which serves as a means of inter-ethnic communication. Some Kazakhs speak Russian, which is declining among Mongols but is becoming increasingly important to Kazakhs as their ties with Kazakhstan strengthen. Kazakhs in Mongolia profess Islam.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Kazakh population remained the main ethnic group in Mongolia. According to the 2020 census conducted in Mongolia, over 120,000 Kazakhs live in the country, or 3.8% of the total population. The remainder, just over 12% of the population, comprises other ethnic groups in Mongolia (Figure 2).

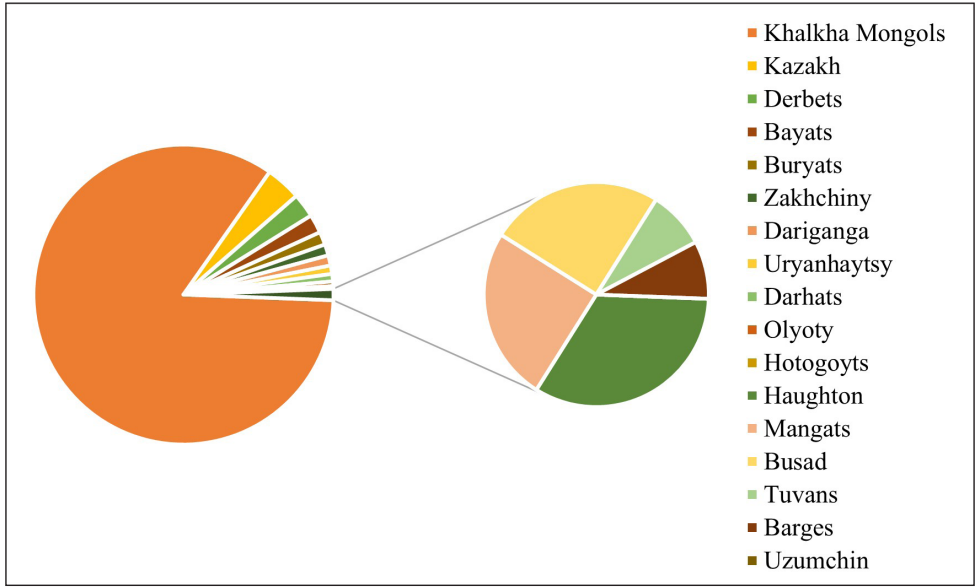


Figure 2: Ethnic structure of the population of Mongolia (%). Source: compiled by the authors based on the 2020 Population and Housing Census of Mongolia: National Report (National Statistics Office of Mongolia, 2020).

The above modern data reflects the same ethnic trends in Mongolia's population as in 1950 and subsequent years. In 1956, there were almost 37,000 Kazakhs in Mongolia, and by 1989, that number had already reached 120,000. However, by 2000, the number of Kazakhs in Mongolia had decreased to 100,000, due to the migration to the territory of Kazakhstan, which became independent after the collapse of the USSR (Bayantor et al., 2004). The settlement of Kazakhs in Mongolia has contributed to the formation of mixed communities. Kazakhs and Mongols exchanged traditions, language, and religious practices. One of the most striking examples of the enrichment of Mongolian culture with Kazakh traditions is Nauryz, a celebration of the new year and spring (Thiess, 2023).

Demographic growth, the increase in the Kazakh population, and the strengthening and expansion of ties with Kazakhstan in the 1920s and 1990s could have caused political and diplomatic tensions in Mongolia and the region, due to fears of separatist sentiment, competition for labor and natural and mineral resources, grazing land, and so on. However, the common destiny, friendly relations, mutual respect, and cooperation between the two countries have had multiple impacts on regional relations, affecting cultural, economic, political, and sociocultural levels. Kazakhs, being citizens of Mongolia, are elected to legislative and executive bodies, and work and study at universities on an equal footing with Mongolians. For instance, in the 2024 parliamentary elections, five representatives of the Kazakh people were elected as deputies, including one woman (Urazalina, 2024).

As Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Mongolia, Koishybaev noted at the opening of an international conference dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the past decades have contributed to the strengthening of close political dialogue between the two governments, showing mutual understanding and achieving significant success in economic cooperation. In addition, active work was carried out to establish and strengthen cultural and humanitarian exchange, the most important contribution to which was made by the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia, which is the "golden bridge" of friendship and cooperation between the governments ("Kazakhstan – Mongolia", 2022).

The Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia has managed to preserve its cultural identity, language, and traditions despite numerous political and social upheavals. The establishment of schools offering education in the Kazakh language, as well as the availability of Kazakh-language media (newspapers, radio, and television), played a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity. This allowed the Kazakh community in Mongolia to retain strong ties to their heritage and ensure the transmission of cultural practices to future generations. The Soviet policy of internationalization had a significant impact on the socioeconomic and cultural processes among the Kazakh population in Mongolia. The establishment of Bayan-Ulgii as a semi-autonomous region facilitated the preservation of Kazakh culture through educational programs and integration into the local political and social systems. These measures helped preserve Kazakh identity amid external political challenges.

Furthermore, the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia has contributed to the cultural enrichment of the country. The Kazakh community brought with them traditions, including the celebration of Nauryz, which was adopted into Mongolian culture, enriching Mongolia's multicultural landscape. Through these exchanges, the Kazakh diaspora has played an important role in shaping the sociocultural fabric of Mongolia, helping preserve its cultural heritage while also contributing to the host country's development. In conclusion, the Kazakh diaspora's experience in Mongolia reflects a dynamic process of cultural preservation and adaptation that has not only ensured the survival of Kazakh identity outside its historical homeland but also enriched Mongolia's cultural diversity.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed significant negative trends in the development of Kazakh statehood during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, driven by a series of political events under Tsarist Russia and the Soviet regime. Between 1926 and 1959, the proportion of Kazakhs in eastern Kazakhstan sharply declined from 53% to 25.9%, while the Russian population surged to 60.2%. In contrast, the Kazakh population in Mongolia grew from 37,000 in 1956 to 120,000 by 1989, and reached 121,000 by 2020. Despite political repression and challenges such as collectivization and forced migration, the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia managed to preserve its cultural identity while integrating into Mongolian society. The Soviet-style internationalization policy in Mongolia facilitated the creation of a multiethnic society, allowing Kazakhs to access education, information, and political participation in their native language. This period strengthened cultural ties between Mongolia and Kazakhstan, though Soviet policies largely shaped relations.

At present, the Kazakh diaspora in Mongolia continues to play a vital role in fostering mutual trust between the two countries. Celebrations like Nauryz not only enrich Mongolian culture but also reinforce Kazakh identity. Language policy has evolved, with schools in Bayan-Ulgii offering education in Kazakh, Mongolian, and Russian. Social engagement remains high, as demonstrated by the election of an ethnic Kazakh woman to Mongolia's parliament. The study faced limitations due to the inaccessibility of certain archival documents, many of which remain classified by post-Soviet governments. Further research could expand to explore the Kazakh diaspora in countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, or other Central Asian nations, as well as provide new insights from over 2 million archival cards declassified by Kazakhstan at the end of 2023.

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POVZETEK

KAZAŠKA DIASPORA V OBDOBJU SOCIALNIH IN POLITIČNIH EKSPERIMENTOV V MONGOLIJI (1926–1959) TER NJIHOV VPLIV NA REGIONALNE ODNOSE MED MONGOLIJO IN KAZAHSTANOM

Salima Omash, Kalybek Koblandin, Aigerim Ospanova

Avtorji v prispevku proučujejo zgodovino migracij kazaške diaspore v Mongoliji, pri čemer se osredotočajo na ključne družbenopolitične vplive sovjetske politike, kolektivizacije in represije med 20. in 50. leti 20. stoletja. Poudarjajo, da je bilo množično preseljevanje Kazahov v Mongolijo v veliki meri posledica vsesplošne lakote, do katere so privedli ukrepi kolektivizacije v obdobju Sovjetske zveze, skupaj s politično represijo, ki je zdesetkala kazahstansko prebivalstvo. Študija izpostavlja izzive, s katerimi se je soočala diaspora, zlasti prisilno preseljevanje ter težke družbeno-politične razmere zaradi sovjetskih politik in množičnih deportacij.

Kljub težkim preizkušnjam je kazaška diaspora v Mongoliji uspela ohraniti svojo kulturno identiteto z aktivnim sodelovanjem v družbenem, političnem in kulturnem življenju države gostiteljice. V tem pogledu je bil pomemben ukrep ustanovitve province Bayan-Ulgii, polavtonomne regije za Kazaha, ki je kazaški skupnosti omogočila ohranitev jezika, tradicij in občutka pripadnosti, hkrati pa tudi sodelovanje v širšem socialističnem okviru. Avtorji poudarjajo, da so politike spodbujanja multietničnega sodelovanja v socialističnem obdobju Kazahom omogočile dostop do izobraževanja in političnega zastopstva v maternem jeziku, s čimer so se okrepile njihove vezi tako z Mongolijo kot s Kazahstanom.

Raziskava izpostavlja kontinuiteto kazaških kulturnih praks, kot je praznovanje praznika nauruz, ki je okrepilo vezi med obema državama, obogatilo mongolsko družbo ter hkrati okrepilo kazahstansko identiteto. Poleg tega je integracijo kazaške diaspore v mongolsko družbo dodatno okrepilo njihovo politično udejstvovanje, vključno z udeležbo na parlamentarnih volitvah. Poleg tega avtorji ugotavljajo, da je kazaška diaspora pomembno prispevala h gospodarskemu razvoju Mongolije, saj imajo mnogi Kazahi pomembno vlogo v kmetijstvu, živinoreji in trgovini, ki so postali ključni sektorji mongolske ekonomije.

Avtorji raziskujejo tudi dolgoročne posledice teh migracij na odnose med Kazahstanom in Mongolijo ter ugotavljajo, da ima kazaška diaspora še vedno vlogo nekakšnega »zlatega mostu«, ki spodbuja dvostransko sodelovanje na področjih kulture, politike in izobraževanja. Raziskava prav tako osvetljuje zapleteno dinamiko kazaške identitete v Mongoliji, na katero so vplivali zgodovina zatiranja, prisilne migracije ter trdoživo oklepanje kulturne dediščine diaspore.

V zaključku avtorji poudarijo, da bi se morale za boljše razumevanje širših posledic kazaških migracijskih vzorcev raziskave v prihodnosti posvetiti tudi kazaški diaspori v drugih državah, kot sta Afganistan in Iran. Po njihovem mnenju bi bilo treba natančneje preučiti zgodovinske, politične in kulturne dejavnike, ki so vplivali

na kazaško diasporo v Mongoliji, s čimer bi izpostavili pomembno vlogo, ki jo ima še vedno ta skupnost pri krepitevi medsebojnega razumevanja in sodelovanja med Kazahstanom in Mongolijo.

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