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# **Challenges of the ethnic Kazakh repatriates from China in rural Kazakhstan: community building strategies**

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## **Introduction**

**Kazakh returnees from China and the local setting**

**Kazakh language and genealogy and their impact on the identity between locals and returnees**

**Community building and lineage-based gatherings**

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*Key words: oralman, kandas, Kazakh ethnic repatriates from China, re-education camps, community, lineage, Xinjiang*

## **Introduction**

This paper is based on my current PhD research that I started at the University of Zurich (Switzerland) in 2015. My study covers the wider topic, which includes the study of Kazakh genealogy, kinship, the colonial history of south-eastern Kazakhstan, historical migration issues and contemporary ethnic repatriates from Mongolia and China through investigating the questions of gender and seniority and community-building strategies of the returnee groups despite the commonalities with local ethnic Kazakhs. This research was initiated as part of the project on Kinship Universals and Variations with a regional focus on Kazakhstan as a part of the Central Asian region, which was conducted by the Department of Integration and Conflict at the Max Planck Institute for the Social Anthropology (Halle, Germany). Data presented in this working paper was gained from field works in the rural area of south-eastern Kazakhstan between 2016 and 2018.

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To explain the principle of the historical development of the Kazakh community-building it is essential to understand that Kazakh identity is based on multiple identity layers<sup>2</sup>. To be Kazakh in the strict sense means not only to be the Kazakhstani citizen but also the ability to trace own genealogical background - *Zheti Ata*<sup>3</sup> or *The Seven Forefathers* and belonging to one of the lineages - *ruw*. Several of these kinds of lineages constituted the joint membership in a lineage confederation called *Zhuz*. There are three *Zhuz* in Kazakhstan that is distributed regionally- *Uli Zhuz* in the South and the South-East, *Orta Zhuz* in the Center, North and East and the *Kishi Zhuz* in the west of Kazakhstan<sup>4</sup>. The translation of the meaning of the word *ruw* could be “lineage” or “clan”. According to Robert Parkin, “lineage is a descent group, which are shallow enough for the links between all their members to be known and traceable” and “clan is a descent group of a deeper extent, beyond a limit of such knowledge, and unilineal descent groups especially are typically descended from a mythical, not a living or recently deceased ancestor, nor even a historical one in many cases”. Both designations are valid for *ruw*, whilst in some cases, *ruw* might mean bigger lineage where the ancestor was a historical or legendary personage or the forefather of a third or more degree<sup>5</sup>. *Zhuz* are *ruw* (lineage) confederations that historically spread in the different parts of Kazakhstan and irridenta of the neighbouring countries. For instance, irridenta and diaspora in China consist mostly of Kazakhs of the *Orta Zhuz* and *Uli Zhuz*.

As for Syroyezhkin “Kazakhs remained as an ethnic community, which was divided by the state borderline. However, despite belonging to one ethnic group, living on the territory of another country, and being involved in its specific socio-economic and political processes, the Kazakhs of the PRC<sup>6</sup> were subject to a different logic of historical development and the formation of their social structure and national identity proceeded differently”<sup>7</sup>. In this paper, I argue that *ethnic Kazakh returnees from China* create their community-building strategies based on lineage-based kinship institutions adapting them to modern Kazakhstani realms. Using practices and tactics for reunification in the new settings *Kazakh ethnic returnees from*

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<sup>2</sup> Schatz, Edward. 2000. “The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52(3). P. 489-490.

<sup>3</sup> Shatz, Edward. “Modern clan politics : The Power of Blood in Kazakhstan and Beyond” University of Washington Press 2004. p. 28. The *Zheti Ata* is an important institution that validate one’s membership to certain *ruw* and one of the *zhuz*.

<sup>4</sup> Vostrov, VV, Mukanov MS. *Rodoplemennoi sostav i rasselenie kazakhov (konets 19 nachalo 20 vv)/Родоплеменной состав и расселение казахов (конец 19 начало 20 вв)* Izdatelstvo “Nauka Kazakhs” Kazakhskoi SSR Alma-Ata-1968. Schatz Edward. *The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan* *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 3 Taylor & Francis, Ltd .2000, p. 590.

<sup>5</sup> Parkin, Robert. *Kinship an introduction to a basic concept*. Wiley-Blackwell; 1st edition ,1997. P 14-27.

<sup>6</sup> People’s republic of China

<sup>7</sup> Syroyezhkin K. *Kazakhstan-Kitai: ot prigranichnoi torgovli k strategicheskomu partnerstvu. Kniga 1. V nachale puti.* (Kazakhstan-China: From Cross-Border Trade to Strategic Partnership. Book 1. The Beginning) Almaty, 2010. P. 137.

*China* seek for calling out the members of the same *ruw* to re-establish and renew their networks thereby acting like a diaspora.

For my study, I decided to make the distinction between *ethnic Kazakhs* of the researched village according to their place of origin. I call the *Local Kazakhs* those who was born in Kazakhstan, and the two other groups of *Kazakh ethnic repatriates* I call *Kazakhs born in China* and *Kazakhs born in Mongolia*<sup>8</sup>. *Kazakh ethnic repatriates from China* in Kazakhstan are part of the larger group of *ethnic repatriates*, who were recalled from abroad due to nation-building politics after the collapse of the USSR. The nation-building politics was created to fulfil the gaps in the number of *ethnic Kazakhs* in Kazakhstan, which according to the last census of 1989 was less than 40% within Kazakhstan<sup>9</sup>. The basic principles of the repatriation policy were embodied in the "Concept of repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs to their historical homeland" approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 16 September 1998. Due to the fact of the recent renaming of the returnees, known as *oralman*<sup>10</sup> from 1997 to 2020 and called now as *kandas*<sup>11</sup>, I will use in this paper the combined term *oralman-kandas* for those *ethnic Kazakh returnees* who came to Kazakhstan and benefited from this special regulation for some years before being granted a full Kazakhstani<sup>12</sup>.

Connection to the land of birth within *ethnic Kazakhs born in China* has manifested a strong attachment to the history of their ancestors who somehow or other appeared there. Within groups of *ethnic Kazakhs born in China* in south-eastern Kazakhstan, there were roughly two types of them: firsts knew that their fathers or grandfathers came from a particular part of Kazakhstan at the beginning of the 20th century, escaping the October Revolution or later collectivisation, and the seconds were identifying themselves as indigenous people of

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<sup>8</sup> I, nevertheless, understand that all three groups have full citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan and associate themselves as Kazakhstani, this measure has been chosen only for study purposes but not for offensive or discriminative purposes.

<sup>9</sup> Kozina VV. Demograficheskaya istoriya Kazakhstana (Demographic History of Kazakhstan). Tutorial. Karaganda, Izdatelstvo KarGU, 2007. p.76. Kalysh A., Kassymova D. Repatrianty Kazakhstana (Repatriates of Kazakhstan). Almaty, "Qazaq universiteti" 2015. p. 52-53.

<sup>10</sup> Literally the word "*oralman*" means "*returnee*". Yet, this word had negative connotation. Discussion on the change of the term *oralman* see Mukanova Zarina, Steenberg Rune. Returnees, blood relatives or backwards? Foreign politics, stigma and coloniality in the debate about how to call ethnic Kazakh immigrants to Kazakhstan. Geographica Augustana (33). Augsburg, Institut für Geographic, Universität Augsburg. 2021. <https://opus.bibliothek.uni-augsburg.de/opus4/frontdoor/index/index/start/2/rows/20/sortfield/score/sortorder/desc/searchtype/simple/query/Beyond+post-soviet/docId/89035>

<sup>11</sup> I use transliteration *Kandas* instead of *Qandas*, while *Kandas* has already being used in English scholarly literature and media. Nevertheless I accept the fact that original word *Қандас* in Kazakh language should be properly written as *Qandas*, while Latin "Q" is goes for Kazakh letter "Қ" and "K" obviously goes for Kazakh "К". I intentionally do not want to confuse international readers with introduction of another transliterated version. In my previous article I have used the version *Kandas* too.

<sup>12</sup> <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-words-mean-everything-in-ethnic-kazakh-debate>. On the discussion of the changing of the term "oralman" to "kandas" see Zarina Mukanova, Rune Steenberg. *Returnees, blood relatives*

north-western China. “We always lived there [in China],” said *Bakyt aga* during our conversation<sup>13</sup>. Looking at the historical evidence, before the mid-18th century, roughly the north-western China were occupied originally by *Oirat-Dzhunghars*<sup>14</sup>, that was why the place were called *Dzhungharia*. Only after the complete defeat of *Dzhunghars* in 1755-1758, did these empty places become occupied by *Taranchi* (later Uighurs) and Kazakh nomads, among the other Turkic speaking Muslim groups. After defeating the *Dzhunghar Khanate*, the Chinese imperial power, the Qing, tried to secure their western frontiers from the invasion of the nomads, preventing them to settle. Nevertheless, despite the ban by Qing authorities, several groups of Kazakh lineages of *Orta Zhuz* and *Uli Zhuz* started to migrate to the empty territories of *Dzhungharia*: *Kerey* to the valley of the Black Irtysh River, *Naiman* to the basin of the Ebinor, *Alban* migrated on the left banks of the Ili river and *Suan* on the right side of the Ili river<sup>15</sup>. As for historian *Gulnar Mukanova*<sup>16</sup>, at the beginning of the 19-century summer pastures (*zhailaw*) of *Alban* and *Suan* were spread further line of Qing’s security borders.

The motivations to move to the historical homeland of Kazakhs from Mongolia were broadly studied by scholars<sup>17</sup> unlike decisions of *ethnic Kazakhs of China*<sup>18</sup>. The motifs for decisions were always different for each individual and family. Rationalization of the decisions came as an answer to the question of why this decision was made. The most popular was the patriotic motif that pushed *ethnic Kazakhs from China* to move to their homeland. Coming and settling in Kazakhstan *oralman-kandas from China* felt disoriented and hard to adapt and it is clear why they felt attracted to keep in touch with other *ethnic Kazakh born in China*, with

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with *Bakyt aga* ethnic Kazakh from China in May 2017.

<sup>14</sup> *Oirats* or *Oirat-Zhungars* western Mongols/western most group of Mongols. From the 16 century, the *Dzhungar khanate* controlled over the East of the nowadays Kazakhstan, West of Mongolia and large part of the Sinkiang. See *Moiseyev VA*. *Dzhungarkoe hanstvo i kazahi 17-18vv.* (Zhungar Khanate and Kazakhs in 17-8 centuries) *Almaty “Gylym”* 1991. p.6-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Kerey* and *Naiman* are the larger lineage units lineages of *Orta Zhuz*. *Alban* and *Suan* are the larger lineage units of *Uli Zhuz*.

<sup>16</sup> *Mukanova GK*. *Migracii kazahov v Centralnoi Azii: vzglyad v proshloye i popitka prognozirovaniya* (Migration of Kazakhs in Central Asia: Looking Back in Time and Forecast) // *Vestnik Evrazii*. №2. 1996. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/migratsii-kazahov-v-tsentralnoy-azii-vzglyad-v-proshloe-i-popytka-prognozirovaniya>. p.64.

<sup>17</sup> *Werner C., Barcus H*. *Mobility and Immobility in a Transnational Context: Changing Views of Migration Among the Kazakh Diaspora in Mongolia* Article in *Migration Letters*. 2009; *Werner, C. and Barcus, H.* (2015), *The Unequal Burdens of Repatriation: A Gendered View of the Transnational Migration of Mongolia's Kazakh Population*. *AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST*, 117: 257-271; *Holly Barcus & Cynthia Werner* (2010) *The Kazakhs of Western Mongolia: transnational migration from 1990–2008*, *Asian Ethnicity*, 11:2, 209-228; *Alexander C Diener* (2005) *Kazakhstan's Kin State Diaspora: Settlement Planning and the Oralman Dilemma*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57:2, 327-348; *ALFF, HENRYK*. “Renegotiating Integration: Dual Citizenship and the Mobilisation of Social Networks of Mongolia’s Kazakhs.” *Inner Asia*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2013, pp. 101–19; *Eva-Marie Dubuisson & Anna Genina* (2011) *Claiming an ancestral homeland: Kazakh pilgrimage and migration in Inner Asia*, *Central Asian Survey*, 30:3-4, 469-485; *Finke Peter*. *Kazakhs of Western Mongolia*. In *Contemporary Kazakhs*. Ed. *Svanberg, Ingvar*. *Cultural and Social Perspectives*. Routledge 1999; *Finke Peter*. *Historical Homelands and Transnational Ties: the Case of the Mongolian Kazakhs*. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 2013, Bd. 138, H. 2, Special Issue: *Mobility and Identity in Central Asia* (2013), pp. 175-193

<sup>18</sup> *Shanatibieke, Mayinu*. *China Kazakhs' emigration to Kazakhstan from a modernity perspective*. In: *Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series*, No. 33, 2016. p.7 and *Kaiser Markus, Beimenbetov Serik*. *The Role of Repatriate Organisations in the Integration of Kazakhstan’s Oralmandar*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2020

whom they could have fewer emotional and cultural differences. While still having certain nostalgia *oralman-kandas from China* was very much firm in their choices to come to their historical homeland which they undoubtedly assumed as Kazakhstan. The return to one's homeland was perceived as a sacred duty.

In 2017 during my stay in the village of my research, I witnessed some Kazakh specialists and simple people born in China who migrated to Kazakhstan were recalled to come back to China to finish some bureaucratic works. There were also cases when *ethnic Kazakhs born in China* while visiting their relatives in China, were caught by Chinese police, interrogated, put under surveillance and house arrest and in many cases detained. Later many of them were not able to come back to Kazakhstan and most of them were trapped in so-called educational camps.

To protect my interlocutors, I have anonymized their names and use the name *Azharly* for the village of my research. I also anonymized the name of the smaller lineage (*ruw*) to "*Konizbai*", as this might be harmful to people who belong to this lineage. Nevertheless, I decided to live the actual names of the bigger lineages like *Kerey, Naiman, Kyzai* and *Ityeli*. Herewith I declare that most of the information and contacts I have received in the grace of my host families and their networks.

### **Kazakh returnees from China and the local setting**

I started my research in the small village called *Azharly* which was an entry point to the summer pasture in the northern part of the Almaty province. This village and two other small villages were part of the former Khrushchev *kolkhoz*<sup>19</sup> and today were counted as one administrative unit. The administration of all three villages is situated in the *Azharly* village. In former times this was a summer pasture where the local Kazakh nomads herd their stock. There were lots of natural spring fountains in these places that had been hidden and closed by

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<sup>19</sup> I have changed the name of the former *kolkhoz* for the reason of anonymisation.

outmigrant Kazakhs. Escaping from the Red Army soldiers, they covered all those fountains not to give a chance the pursuers to survive<sup>20</sup>.

During the Soviet Union, the main duty of this *kolkhoz* was cattle breeding. Within Soviet times, the village of *Azharly* was informally divided into two-part Russian and Ukrainian by people of the *kolkhoz*. According to my *local Kazakh* and *Russian* interlocutors, the village had two parts or streets called *Ukrainskaya* the street where mostly Ukrainians lived and *Russkaya* street where Russians lived. Several Kazakh families lived either on the Ukrainian or Russian side of the village. Today there are six shops in the village four of them situated in *Azharly* and two of them are 24/7. There is a school and a kindergarten as well as a Culture house and a medical point. The population of the village according to the census of 2009 is around 800 people. There are three groups of Kazakhs present in the village of *Azharly*. *Ethnic Kazakh from Mongolia* live 19 dwellings, *ethnic Kazakh from China* live in 59 dwellings and *local Kazakhs* had 62 dwellings. There are also around 32 *Russian families*<sup>21</sup>.

The northern part of the former Almaty province<sup>22</sup> was historically bordered between *Uli Zhuz* and *Orta Zhuz*. Many of the *Zhalair ruw* from *Uli Zhuz* live in the southerner to the city of Taldykorgan and close by as well as *Naiman ruw* from *Orta Zhuz* who settle more in the northern part. I have initiated my research based on this border between two wider Kazakh *ruws*. In studying local families in the village, I was curious to see how many *Zhalair* and *Naiman* would be there. During Soviet times, there was labour migration politics to distribute specialists in regions where it was most needed. Many of the specialists were sent to various regions of the USSR during its first decades. Later this tendency worked according to the planning economy and young college or university graduates did not know where he or they would be sent. In the village of *Azharly*, these kinds of specialists who had been distributed were a major part of the villagers. The number of lineages that appears among *local Kazakhs* in the village was *Naiman*, *Kongirat*, *Argyn* from *Orta Zhuz* and *Zhalair* from *Uli Zhuz*.

It was not physically possible to get information about all *ethnic Kazakh returnees* of the village, but those who agreed to give some information appeared to be of *Orta Zhuz*. *Ethnic*

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<sup>20</sup> From the conversation with the local Kazakh Isatai aga in summer 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Between 2016-2018 during my fieldwork, the non-ethnic Kazakh families were all called Russians.

<sup>22</sup> In 2022 Almaty province was divided into two parts when the northern part with the city of Taldykorgan with adjacent lands become the new region called Zhtisuw province.

*Kazakhs born in China* were called *Chinese* by *local Kazakhs* and *Kazakhs from Mongolia*, while *Kazakhs born in Mongolia* were called *Mongols* and *locals* were called *mestniy* in Russian or *zhergilikti* in Kazakh which means “local”. It was interesting that local Russian families did not call *Kazakhs from Mongolia* as “*oralman*”<sup>23</sup> but they applied this term only to *ethnic Kazakhs from China*. This kind of differentiation came from the fact that *Kazakhs from Mongolia* started to migrate to Kazakhstan in the early 1990s before *ethnic Kazakhs from China* started to move to Kazakhstan. Another fact is that the term *oralman* was inserted in 1997 and all *ethnic Kazakhs* who decided to migrate to Kazakhstan after that had their special *oralman-passports* which allowed them to get quota benefits and ease the process of obtaining citizenship.

Most of my interlocutors within *ethnic Kazakhs born in Mongolia* who I met in the village belonged to the *Kerey ruw* and were called *Abak Kerey*. *Kerey ruw* has two branches, *Abak* is one of them. *Kerey* has numerous small lineages that are not allowed to intermarry if members are of the same lineage. *Ethnic Kazakhs born in China* of the village belong to different *ruws* but mostly different units of *Kerey* and *Naiman*.

### **Kazakh language and genealogy and their impact on the identity between locals and returnees**

To explain the differences in identity between *local Kazakhs* and *Kazakhs born in China*, I would need to show how both groups (*local ethnic Kazakhs* and *Kazakh ethnic returnees*) relate themselves to Kazakh language issues, and history and genealogy. It is essential to mention that strictly speaking Kazakh identity consists of two layers: if one is Kazakh that means he or she belongs to one of the *ruw* of the three *Zhuz* and is able to trace own genealogy of *Zheti Ata, The Seven Forefathers*. Another identity pattern is speaking the Kazakh language, which is an obvious pattern but has been a big issue in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

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<sup>23</sup> During the time of my research the term *oralman* was in use.

***Kazakh language.*** In Post-Soviet Kazakhstan the question of the language was one of the most discussed. The reason for this was the fact that according to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kazakh language has the status of “state language”<sup>24</sup>, but in the “state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language”. According to Oka, Russia has demanded that the former Soviet states give the Russian language the status of a second state language<sup>25</sup>. This issue of using the Russian language and preference in some places given to the Russian language over Kazakh is still debated in Kazakhstan<sup>26</sup>. To explain the Kazakh and Russian language issues it is necessary to refer to some historical facts, that will give a glimpse into the status of the Kazakh language and its perception among the local Kazakh population.

Jyldyz Smagulova describes the three waves of immigration of the Slavic population to Kazakhstani steppes: the first wave occurred after the tsarist government abolished serfdom in 1889 and issued a ‘Law on Voluntary Relocation of Rural Citizens to State Lands’. Waves of Russian peasants began to migrate into Kazakhstan, appropriating the best fertile lands near rivers and lakes and pushing the nomad Kazakh from the north and north-east to the south and east. The second wave happened during Stolypin’s agrarian reforms at the beginning of the 20s century. After its incorporation into the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan became a place for the deportation of the political and criminal outcasts, and enemies. Ethnic groups and potential collaborators with Nazi Germany and Japan. In the 1950-and 1970 huge waves of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants came due to the “Virgin Land” campaign, which made Kazakhs a minority<sup>27</sup>.

It is important to mention that these migration waves of non-Kazakhs into Kazakhstan also caused the outmigration of ethnic Kazakhs to border countries which also had several stages. According to Mendikulova and Amantayeva<sup>28</sup> there were two stages of emigration of Kazakhs to neighbouring countries: first was in 1860-1890, due to the conclusion of interstate treaties on the development of trade relations and territorial and state boundaries between

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.parlam.kz/en/constitution>

<sup>25</sup> Oka N. Managing Ethnicity Under Authoritarian Rule: Transborder Nationalisms in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies. 2007. p.174

<sup>26</sup> Orisbayev, Zholdas. Kazakh language police trigger Russian politicians. Fringe Kazakh nationalists are giving politicians in Moscow something to campaign about. Aug 16, 2021. <https://eurasianet.org/kazakh-language-police-trigger-russian-politicians>

<sup>27</sup> Smagulova, Jyldyz. KAZAKHSTAN Language, identity and conflict. Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research Volume 19, - Issue 3-4: Community Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Era. 2006. p. 305-307.

<sup>28</sup> Mendikulova GM, Amantayeva BZh. Istoriya migratsiy mezhdu Kazakhstanom I Kitayem 1860-1960 (History of migrations between Kazakhstan and China 1860-1960)). Almaty, 2008. P. 68-70.

Russia and China, which led to breaking kinship ties between Kazakhs who appeared to be living on the two different sides of the border. Repressive politics of the Qing Empire caused numerous rebels of the Turkic Muslim population in Xinjiang while immigration of the Slavic peasantry pushed Kazakh nomads from their locations. The second stage was from 1900-to 1917 when new types of international migrations occurred. A huge outmigration wave was due to the national liberation uprising and punitive measures of tsarist Russia. The starvation from the famine in the 1920-1930<sup>29</sup> and deportation of political and criminal convicts and “non-socialist”, “enemy” ethnic groups led to a decrease in the Kazakh ethnic population in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhs support the October Revolution because they were promised to gain equality, sovereignty, and self-determination. “The new language policy of the Soviet state aimed at modernization of national languages and their status planning. The Kazakh language rapidly developed new functions in bureaucracy, education and publishing” writes Smagulova<sup>30</sup>. Due to the politics of korenizatciya in 1923, the Decree on Languages, the Resolution on Increasing the Number of Employees Speaking the Kazakh Language, the Resolution on Strengthening Control over Increasing the Number of Employees Working in the Kazakh Language, the Resolution of the Provincial Committee of the VKP(b) on Obstacles to Great Power Chauvinism in Employing Kazakhs in the Apparatus and Industry of the Republic, the Resolution of the Provincial Committee of the VKP(b) on the Next Measures for Providing Enterprises with Indigenous Population Representatives were adopted. These documents helped to increase the employment of Kazakhs in industry and the administration and to expand the use of the Kazakh language. And the Decision of the Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party(b) of 4.04.1933 provided for a full translation of records into the Kazakh language in such structures as the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh Republic, the People's Commissariat for Education, the People's Commissariat for Health Care, the People's Commissariat of Justice, the Workers' and Peasants' Militia<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Kindler, Robert. *Stalin's Nomads*. University of Pittsburgh Press. Cameron, S. 2018; *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*. Cornell University Press, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Smagulova, *KAZAKHSTAN Language, identity and conflict*, p. 307.

<sup>31</sup> Hallez, Xavier. *Petite histoire des dictionnaires kazakh-russes (1861-2002) : parmi les alphabets arabe, latin et cyrillique*, *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* [En ligne], 11/12 | 2004, mis en ligne le 26 juin 2009, consulté le 03 mai 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/asiacentrale/705> p. 294.; Zhumashev RM., Dosova BA., Zhumanova AZ., Nygmetuli D. *Sovremennaya yazikovaya politika v Respublike Kazakhstan (Modern Language Politics in the Republic of Kazakhstan)* Vestnik KarGU, 2017. <https://articlekz.com/article/17700>

Debates related to the shift from Arabic script to Latin started in 1924 and were finally implemented in 1929 as a part of the Cultural Revolution<sup>32</sup>. One of the arguments for shifting to a Latin Alphabet was the fight against the backwardness of Islam where the Arabic script was highly connected to Islam. In 1940 Cyrillic Alphabet was imposed, and in 1941 benefits that the Kazakh language could give to non-Kazakh specialists were terminated. Moving to the Cyrillic alphabet meant the end of many policies for developing the Kazakh language and the beginning of russification. In 1950 the Kazakh language started to be wiped out: it was not obligatory anymore and led to the limitation of the classes Kazakh language in the schools, TV and Radio programs, etc<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, financing for Russian and Kazakh schools was not equal. As a result, the level of education provided at Kazakh schools dropped dramatically, as did enrolment: in 1958, 75% of Kazakh children attended Kazakh schools; by 1991, only 34.4% did, most of them being in rural areas<sup>34</sup>.

These all shifts pushed Kazakhs among the other ethnic groups and nationalities to use more Russian language. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kazakhstani state provided a rather soft policy on reinforcing ties of the Kazakh language with its ethnicity<sup>35</sup>. Today the Russian language is the lingua franca among different ethnic groups and the prevailing language of administration, science, mass media and business, while the Kazakh language is the language of a titular nationality<sup>36</sup>. For Kazakh ethnic repatriates from the countries like Mongolia and China, the reality of their historical homeland was not the same as they expected. The lack of Russian language knowledge complicated the integration into the local society as well as challenged the idea of a “Kazakhs homeland”<sup>37</sup>.

As for Benson and Svanberg, Kazakhs in China speak the Kazakh language, but some scholars divide it into two dialects, northern and southern<sup>38</sup>. The written language used in the USSR for the Kazakhs was based on the northern dialect while China’s Kazakhs are speakers of the southern dialect. Kazakhs from China used Arabic Alphabet for their written language,

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<sup>32</sup> Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Cornell University Press, 2001. p. 182-204.

<sup>33</sup> Suleimenova, E. *Yazaykovaja politika v Kazakstane (1921-1997): Sbornik Dokumnetov (Language Policy in Kazakhstan (1921-1997): Collection of Documents)*, Qazaq Universiteti, Almaty. 1997. p. 177-180.

<sup>34</sup> UNDP (1995) *Kazakhstan: Otchet po chelovecheskomu razvitiju [Kazakhstan: Human Development Report]*, UNDP, Almaty.

<sup>35</sup> Smagulova. *KAZAKHSTAN Language, identity and conflict ...*, p. 312.

<sup>36</sup> Oka N. *Managing Ethnicity Under Authoritarian Rule: Transborder Nationalisms in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*. Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies. 2007. p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> Diener, Alexander. *Kazakhstan's Kin State Diaspora: Settlement Planning and the Oralman Dilemma*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57:2, 2005. p.340

<sup>38</sup> Benson L., Svanberg I. *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks*. Routledge. 1998. p.47, 173.

like Soviet Kazakhs until 1929. After the revolution in 1949, debates on common written language for all minorities began in China. Later under the influence of the Soviets, the Chinese government announced that Xinjiang Kazakhs would use Cyrillic script in 1956. But after two years, due to border Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1958, the Cyrillic shift for Kazakhs was abandoned. Instead, Kazakhs were told to use the Latin alphabet, which was to be adapted for all languages in China. Many newspapers started to publish in Latinized Kazakh to popularise it. Nevertheless, again in 1981, there was a state decision to come back to Arabic script. All Latin published media was withdrawn. Gradually by 1990 literature, texts and reference works were readily changed to Arabic script<sup>39</sup>.

According to Samayev, the first media in the Kazakh language appeared in China in the mid-1930s. First newspapers, journals and publications were published in Kazakh in Altai, Ili and Tarbagatai counties of the Xinjiang region. After the revolution and establishment of the PRC, radio broadcasts appeared in the Kazakh language. Most of the publications came from Ili Kazakh Autonomous Province. With the digital brought to Xinjiang, new websites in the Kazakh language were opened<sup>40</sup>.

*Genealogy. Shezhire*<sup>41</sup> describes the position of every individual within society and in relation to others. Even before Soviet times, Russian Empire not only pointed out the 'backwardness' of the nomads but also implanted in their minds a corresponding feeling based on the recognition of their cultural inferiority and the ability of the Russians to 'help' them overcome their civilisation 'lag'<sup>42</sup>. Soviet “modernisation” aimed to educate and “civilize” backward populations on their way to the accomplishment of Communism<sup>43</sup>. Yet, for Essenova after gaining the independence that “pushed the historic trajectory of the Kazakh nation further ahead, prompting its citizens to engage in self-reflection and attuning their collective memories

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<sup>39</sup> Benson L., Svanberg I. China's Last Nomads. p.175.

<sup>40</sup> Samayev A. Kazahskaya diapora i irridenta v KNR ivozmoznozt polucheniya informacii na kazahskom yazike (Kazakh Diaspora and irridenta in PRC and possibility to get information in Kazakhs Language) Sotsialno-ekonomicheskiye i etnokulturnie processy v Verhnem Priirtishye v XVII-XX vekah: Sbornik materialov mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferencii. Novosibirsk: Parallel, 2011. <http://sibistorik.ru/project/conf2010/045-samayev.htm> p. 249-252.

<sup>41</sup> *Shezhire* is an oral genealogy of Kazakhs, today it performed in written and printed.

<sup>42</sup> Remnev A. Kolonialnost, postkolonialnost I “istoricheskaya Politika” v sovremennom Kazahstane (Coloniality, Postcoloniality and “Historical Politics” in Contemporary Kazakhstan) *Ab Imperio*, 1/2011, p. 175

<sup>43</sup> Kudaibergenova Diana T. “Imagining community” in Soviet Kazakhstan. An historical analysis of narrative on nationalism in Kazakh-Soviet literature”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 2013. P.13.

to a new set of social and political realities". That shows the hunger of Kazakhs to come back to their roots<sup>44</sup>.

The genealogical agency was accepted on the state level while it was stated as a reason for blood relatedness of Kazakhs abroad to move to their historical homeland. Strictly speaking, this was the only reason under cover of the nation-building politics. Nevertheless, the state seemed never to set up the task of smooth cultural adaptation and socialisation for *oralman-kandas Kazakhs*. As a result, *oralman-kandas* were left to themselves and had to occupy an unfavourable economic niche to support themselves that accidentally appeared in traditional livestock breeding which *oralman-kandas from China and Mongolia* were capable to do. The latter fact of performing unpopular activities in eyes of *the local Kazakhs* even more increased cultural distance between them creating for the moment a kind of social order between them where *the oralman-kandas* were herders and locals were working class. It does not, nevertheless, mean that there were no locals who did not have farms and bred the livestock and there were no etchers and doctors among *the oralman-kandas*.

In a process of historical dynamics the traditions and customs became a tool of ethnic identity for those Kazakhs who were separated from their homeland. Although living in different cultural societies did not give them chance to follow external identity markers, *the oralman-kandas Kazakhs* use their lineages as a part of their identity. Lineage division became the main navigator in the socio-economic field for *the ethnic Kazakhs* who live outside of Kazakhstan<sup>45</sup>. While moving to their historical homeland they keep using lineage-based identity to build their marriage strategies and social mobility.

Acting as diaspora appeared in how *the oralman-kandas* made their preferences over whom to be connected to and associated to. They make the choice to create their own communities based on *shezhire*. They assemble and inquire to assemble based on their clan memberships in order to familiarise themselves with each other. Furthermore, they created their own parallel universe of agencies directed to serve and support their own kind. One of the strongest identity patterns that *ethnic Kazakhs born in China* is their lineage identity as well their substantial attachment to customs and traditions. Both of which of course opposed them

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<sup>44</sup> Essenova, Saulesh. "Routes and Roots" of Kazakh Identity: Urban Migration in Postsocialist Kazakhstan. *The Russian Review*, 2005. p.664.

<sup>45</sup> Kalysh A., Kassymova D. *Repatrianty Kazakhstana (Repatriates of Kazakhstan)*. Almaty, "Qazaq universiteti" 2015. p. 52-53.

to *the local Kazakhs*, who looked weak in their acquaintance with simple traditions, in addition to not always being able to follow the conversation in the native Kazakh language. Taking advantage of the unwillingness of *the local Kazakhs* to live in the rural area and breed cattle, *ethnic Kazakhs born in China* occupy this economic niche. Today *Kazakhs born in China* willingly occupy this unfavourable (for *the local Kazakhs*) segment of traditional farming while balancing economics. Mirasbek, *Kazakh born in China*, in a personal conversation in the summer of 2016, while describing to me his obstacles in finding a job in the local job market, told me that after trying different businesses he and his family finally decided to do traditional pastoral livestock breeding. “It was the only choice for us, and we are succeeding,” he said<sup>46</sup>.

It won't be right to say that local Kazakhs are not interested in their clan identities. Contrary, they are aware of the names of their own and maternal lineages as well. As Schatz mentions that during the Soviet period the lineage identities were not erased in Kazakhstan, they were simultaneously preserved and profoundly transformed by the material and discursive practices of the Soviet state<sup>47</sup>. Numerous books on genealogy have been printed by scholars, specialists, and enthusiasts. Traditional writers of *shezhire* publish their own views on the history of their lineage, *ruw*, *Zhuz* or history of the whole Kazakh Khanate. For example, Kairolla Gabzhalilov who is the director of “Alash” historical research centre published volumes of Kazakh genealogies where each volume was dedicated to one of the *ruw*. For 13 years in a row, they write and research Kazakh different clans and lineages. He has published 43 volumes for each Kazakh *ruw*. Some bigger *ruws* have two or three volumes. In each of the books, there are schemes and detailed explanations of major lineages. There are many professional writers of *shezhire* who refer to a wider scale and put their family into a larger picture of the whole *ruw* as well as people who schematically organize their own family tree. Moreover, it becomes very much trendy to write up the genealogy, especially for educative reasons for the upcoming generations. Of course, the desire of writing the family history is not limited to shaping it into words on paper. New tools like available photo and video cameras made it easy to learn. Thus, it becomes clear that there are several types of collecting *shezhire* according to the market offers and I call it *shezhire*-products on the market.

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<sup>46</sup> Conversation with Mirasbek in summer 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Schatz, Edward. The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan. *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, No 3, 2000. p. 490.

## Community building and lineage-based gatherings

Finding themselves in an unexpectedly different world, *ethnic Kazakhs born in China* started to use this change or disruption as an opportunity to build new networks through the (re)unification of the same *ruw*. This phenomenon is rather crucial and unique and could add to the re-rationalisation fashion within modern Kazakh society and goes together with the trend of (re)writing and (re)constructing shezhire-the oral genealogy. I describe the case studies of initiation of bigger lineage assembly and smaller lineage gathering. One of the main features of a bigger lineage is that members are allowed to marry each other. It is essential to mention that according to the *Zheti Ata rule* the division of the lineages and the appearance of the new lineages were always dependent on the number of offspring which in future formed new dwellings as well as the position within the generational grid. After seven generations, the one that belonged to the eighth generation could form a new *Ata* or lineage name giving it his own name and being included in the bigger lineage. In my thesis, I argue that not only male names appeared among the lineage names but also female names. For instance, the lineage called *Kyzai* of *Naiman*, which is most widespread in Xinjiang's Kazakhs belongs to the historical female character *Kyzai*, the daughter of the *Baidibek bi* and *Domalak ana* from the *Uli Zhuz*, who married a man of *Naiman ruw*. As she appeared to be an outstanding woman, her descendants started a new lineage of her name<sup>48</sup>.

***Ityeli ruw gathering.*** In the case of the bigger lineage *Ityeli*<sup>49</sup>, the gathering was an outstanding event, where members of this lineage were present in all three countries, Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia<sup>50</sup>. The second event was related to a smaller lineage which was divided from the main lineage only a few generations ago, and all its members were yet first and second-degree cousins to each other. Nevertheless, due to migration factors and the big number of offspring, they lost connection to each other and managed at least partly to reunite in Kazakhstan.

The person who gave a name for this lineage *Ityeli* was supposed to live 4-5 hundred years ago. The gathering took place in one of the three restaurants in the small town nearby

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<sup>48</sup> *Shanatibieke, Mayinu*. China Kazakhs' emigration to Kazakhstan, p.11.

<sup>49</sup> Benson L., Svanberg I. China's Last Nomads. p.47.

<sup>50</sup> I believe all attendees of the event lived in Kazakhstan or visiting Kazakhstan.

Taldykorgan, which belonged to one *ethnic Kazakh born in China*. The idea of the organizers was to assemble members of *Ityeli ruw* and introduce them to each other. *Ityeli* is one of the present bigger lineages in Kazakhstan called *Kerey*. Most *Ityeli* live in China and Mongolia, while according to the legend *Ityeli* himself was from eastern Kazakhstan. There were up to 500 people who attended this feast that lasted for almost 8 hours.

One of the participants told, “We came here not for the political reasons but to find out our relatives and get to know each other”. Once he used the word political, I thought that if these kinds of gatherings will continue, they may become powerful<sup>51</sup>.

We arrived there at 10.30 am knowing that it won't start sharp at 10.00 am. And it did not but there were already hundreds of people near the entrance of the restaurant. We entered only at 12.00. But during this time, we met many people at the entrance and introduced ourselves. *Alim*, a *Kazakh man born in China* and one of the organisers of this event who belonged to *Ityeli* himself, also introduced us to other organisers (it was too loud and crowded so I could not remember names) and they put us on the respected place with old men, *törde*<sup>52</sup>.

*Toi*<sup>53</sup> was huge too and amazing itself. Everybody was so happy and looked happy. Mostly there were *Ityeli* from *ethnic Kazakhs returnees from Mongolia and China*, who lived in the east and the south-east of Kazakhstan. They all came for this gathering. People mentioned several times that the purpose of this gathering was not political but to find out relatives. But finding out about their new relatives and *ruw* members means tightening their ties and making themselves stronger.

First, they gave a speech for *Arystan ata*<sup>54</sup>, who was meant to be among the most honourable guests at this event. Then they asked all senior men and women to come to the middle and give a speech. Mostly men were speaking but old ladies were stung at the back by men. Only one lady was given a chance to speak. The rest of the old ladies were dancing the *Kara Zhorga*<sup>55</sup> dance afterwards. Then they gave a speech to the *Ityeli* people from Almaty, then from East Kazakhstan. We left the party while they were speaking. The *toi* was supposed

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<sup>51</sup> This words belong to one of the guests of the *Ityeli ruw* gatherings.

<sup>52</sup> *Tör* is the given normally for honored guests around the *dastarkhan* (tablecloth or in this case feast).

<sup>53</sup> *Toi* could be translated as “feast” or “event”.

<sup>54</sup> *Arystan ata*'s family left Kazakhstan in 1930s and through China, then Tibet, India they finally settled in Turkey. Later *Arystan ata* migrated to Germany along with Turkish labor-migrants.

<sup>55</sup> Popular Kazakh ethnic dance, where the dancers imitate bird's movements.

to be till 5 or 6 in the evening. *Tamada* asked to choose one or two persons from each group to speak to save time. Usually, *tamada* asks to do so on the big *toi*, but it does not always work properly. One *küyew bala*<sup>56</sup> spoke. He said that he is *küyew bala* for everybody at this event and was happy to be there. He also said that he did not realise that he has so many *qayindar* (relatives from his wife's side). Everybody laughed out loud because it was so sincere and spoken in a very funny manner. We left *toi* at 3 pm in the middle of it. Later I found out that it lasted for some hours more.

***Konizbai***. The second event was related to a smaller lineage which was divided from the main lineage only a few generations ago, and all its members were yet first and second-degree cousins to each other. Nevertheless, due to migration factors and the big number of offspring, they lost connection to each other and managed at least partly to reunite in Kazakhstan. They came from different parts of Xinjiang, mostly from the closest town to Kazakhstan, Shaueshek (T-Cheng). The lineage was coming from the *Kyzai* bigger lineage of the *Naiman ruw*<sup>57</sup>. Perhaps the appearance of the new *ruw* called *Konizbai* named by its founder would have been followed according to some rule when the *ruw* may split into smaller lineages or *ruw*. This kind of splitting up could have been also decided at the senior assemblies.

One of my interlocutors, a *Kazakh woman born in China Karlygash* told me how she organised the gathering of people who belong to her *ruw*. She moved to Kazakhstan together with her family (her husband's parents and siblings, her siblings and their two daughters) nine years ago. She belongs to a smaller lineage called *Konizbai* and members of this smaller lineage were not allowed to marry each other since this *ruw* was too small yet and the members of this lineage were children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of *Konizbai* himself. Counting down from *Konizbai* today we could see that there are only 4-5 generations but not yet seven. She said that that was important for her to meet these people and make their children get to know each other. "It would be a disaster if our children fall in love with each other without knowing that they are relatives". Some of the members of this *ruw* moved from China to

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<sup>56</sup> *Küyew bala* means "son-in-law". In this case it means that the man who spoke did not belong to *Itlyeli*, but his wife was from *Itlyeli*. According to Kazakh kinship system, this man has rights to call himself "a son-in-law of *Itlyeli ruw*"

<sup>57</sup> Syroyezhkin K. describes distribution of different lineages of Naiman and Kereys of Orta Zhuz as well as some lineages of the Uli Zhuz. My interlocutors Kazakh born in China were from the lineages that Syroyezhkin had indicated in his book. See Syroyezhkin K. *Kazahi v KNR: Ocherki socialno-ekonomicheskogo i kulturnogo razvitiya* (Казахи в КНР: очерки социально-экономического и культурного развития). Institut razvitiya Kazakhstana. Almaty, 1994. p. 9-11.

Kazakhstan and settled down close to Almaty city. She said that they called each other and organized this gathering previous January<sup>58</sup>. There were around 90 people who attended the gathering including family members and children.

## Conclusion

Even though *the oralman-kandas from China* appear in the Kazakhstani realms for almost thirty years and faced adaptation and socialisation problems and obstacles like the other groups of *the oralman-kandas*, they have become the most problematic group due to the ambiguous international relationships between PRC and Kazakhstan. Last years with the Chinese policies against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, including Kazakhs, which gave way to re-education camps, detentions, interrogations, surveillance and in some places heavy tortures and rapes, the reaction of the Kazakhstani state provoked some desperate moods for Kazakhs born in China as if their voices were muted.

Coming to Kazakhstan, their historical homeland, where some of *the oralman-kandas* had the emotional closeness and patriotic feelings, they nevertheless faced certain alienation because of the Kazakhstani bureaucratic system and the widespread use of the Russian language. The narrative of the stigmatisation of the *the oralman-kandas* for being descendants of those who had to leave the country during the years of famine and collectivisation in the 1930s<sup>59</sup>, was adopted since Soviet times and continued to live in the heads of local Kazakhs who studied history in the schools.

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<sup>58</sup> January 2018

<sup>59</sup> Ablazhei NN. Kazakhskiy migratsionniy mayatnik "Kazakhstan-Xinjiang" Emigratia. Repatriatsiya. Integratsiya (The Kazakh Migration Pendulum "Kazakhstan-Xinjiang". Emigration. Repatriation. Integration). Karagandy, Bolashak Baspa, 2014. p.32-47.



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