

ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF ETHNICITY OF
THE KAZAKHS OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

There are about 5 million Kazakhs living all over the world outside the Republic of Kazakhstan, the largest part of them predictably found in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region of the PRC bordering on Kazakhstan.

There are two distinct groups of Chinese Kazakhs: the clans that migrated to China to avoid collectivization in the Soviet Union and the larger one of indigenous Kazakhs.

Today, the Kazakh diaspora, as all other diasporas for that matter, is facing the challenge of preserving its ethnic identity.

The author analyzes the main results of the sociological studies of the life of the

Kazakhs she has been carrying out since 2010 by different means: polls, in-depth interviews, and observations and polls of experts.

The article contains certain results of sociological expeditions that studied four basic identities—linguistic, religious, zhuz-clan, and cultural.

This combination of different methods helps to analyze the social processes going on in the Kazakh diaspora, identify the impact of individual factors and the degree to which the ethnicity has been preserved, as well as the current state of ethnic identities, and forecast further development.

The article has been written within the project Contemporary Diaspora Studies and the Experience of Kazakhstan in Maintaining Agreement and Tolerance among Ethnicities financed by the project of funding scholarly studies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2015-2017.

KEYWORDS: *Kazakhs, diaspora, migration, Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, Kazakhstan, ethnicity, identity, sociological studies, language, culture, religion, zhuz, clan, national politics.*

Introduction

The Kazakhstan-Chinese border is 1,533 km long. For different reasons, the XUAR is home to the largest (1,557,457, or 7% of the total population) ethnic group of Kazakhs (according to the latest population census of 2010) (see Table 1).¹

Table 1

**The Numerical Strength of
Different Ethnic Groups Living in the XUAR
(the Results of the 2010 Population Census in China)**

No.	Ethnicities	Number (<i>thou.</i>)	Share in the Total XUAR Population (%)
1	Uyghurs	10,528,646	47.3
2	Han	8,472,911	38.1
3	Kazakhs	1,557,457	7.0
4	Dungans (Hui)	1,023,054	4.6
5	Kyrgyz	194,382	0.9
6	Mongols	180,822	0.8
7	Tajiks	48,569	0.22
8	Sibo	42,939	0.2
9	Manchurians	26,648	0.1
10	Uzbeks	17,656	0.08
11	Russians	11,688	0.05
12	Daurs	6,776	0.03
13	Tatars	5,022	0.02
14	Others	143,880	0.6
Total		22,260,450	100.0

Table 2 shows the numerical strength of the Kazakhs living in different types of settlements.² Information about the exact number of Kazakhs in China has always been fairly contradictory. The monograph *Xinjiang, the Land of the Chinese: Past and Present* cites the figure 1,245 thou.

¹ See: *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*, Compiled by Statistics of Xingjian Uyghur Autonomous Region, 2013.

² See: *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

Table 2

**Settlements with a Kazakh Population
(the Results of the 2010 Population Census
in China)**

No.	Region	Number (thou.)
1	Urumqi City	69,153
2	Karamay City	11,753
3	Turpan Administrative Offices	304
4	Hami [Kumul] Administrative Offices	54,268
5	Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture	142,925
6	Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture	1,223,252
7	Bortala Mongol Autonomous Prefecture	48,392
8	Bayangol Mongol Autonomous Prefecture	1,321
9	Aksu Administrative Offices	183
10	Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture	150
11	Kashgar [Kaxgar] Administrative Offices	382
12	Hotan Administrative Offices	83
13	Municipality Country-Level City directly under the Central Government	5,291
Total		1,557,457

Kazakhs living in the XUAR, or 6.47% of the region's total population.³ The Kazakhs assess their numerical strength in the XUAR as up to 2 million.⁴

According to Konstantin Syroezhkin, a Sinologist from Kazakhstan, "even divided by the state border, the Kazakhs have remained a single ethnic community. However, despite their common ethnicity, the fact that they lived in another country and were involved in its social, economic, and political processes means the Kazakhs of the People's Republic of China were guided by different development logic. Their social structure and national self-awareness developed differently."⁵

No diaspora can remain limited to its community; this is especially true of ethnic groups, the culture of which is rooted in nomadism. According to Prof. Anatoly Khazanov of the University of Wisconsin (U.S.), "the important phenomenon of nomadism (while it remains nomadism) really consists in its indissoluble and necessary connection with the outside world; that is to say, with societies which have different economic and social systems."⁶

³ See: *Xinjiang, the Land of the Chinese: Past and Present*, ed. by Li Sheng, Xinjiang People's Publishers, Xinjiang, 2006, p. 6 (in Chinese).

⁴ According to the author's field studies of 2010-2014 in compact settlements of the Kazakhs in the XUAR.

⁵ K.L. Syroezhkin, *Kazakhstan-Kitay: ot prigranichnoy trgovli k strategicheskomu partnerstvu: monografiya*, in three books, Book 1, *The Beginning*, Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies at the President of the RK, Almaty, 2010, p. 137.

⁶ See: A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, Second edition, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, p. 3.

Sociological Study Methodology

This article is based on the results of the author's field studies of 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 carried out the settlements where Kazakhs live in compact groups in the XUAR of China.

The methods employed ranged from polls (450 people), in-depth interviews (90), and observations and experts interviews (20 interviews of government members, academics, journalists, and municipal officials).

The 2012 expedition was funded by the Committee for the Development of Languages at the Ministry of Culture and Information of the RK; its main results were published in a report about the linguistic situation among the ethnic Kazakhs of XUAR.⁷

This article looks at the main components of the diaspora: the ethnic-confessional, linguistic, zhuz-clan, and cultural identities.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is a feature, or a marker of sorts, of individual ethnic affiliation with a group with common self-identity.

It becomes especially pronounced when an individual or a group finds himself/itself in a different ethnic milieu and serves as a sort of shield.

During the sociological poll, the polled Kazakhs were asked "To which nationality do you belong?" All respondents (a total of 450 people) answered that they were ethnic Kazakhs.

When asked "What determines the nationality of Kazakhs?" 89.5% answered that it was knowledge and good command of the native language; 83.8% said it was observance of customs and rites

Table 3

What Determines the Nationality of Kazakhs?

Responses	Percent
Good command of the language of one's ethnicity	89.5
Customs, traditions and cultural values	83.8
Religion	77.5
Nationality of the father	67.9
Racial type	29.8
Personal choice	16.3
Nationality of the mother	9.6
Citizenship	6.7
Place of birth	1.0
Undecided	—

Note: The total is more than 100 percent because the respondents could choose several responses.

⁷ See: A. Sadvokasova, B. Rakisheva, A. Majitova, *Iazykovaia situatsia v srede etnicheskikh kazakhov, prozhivaiushchikh v Kitae (XUAR) (rezultaty kompleksnogo sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia)*, Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 2007, 97 pp. (in Kazakh and Russian).

and the preservation of cultural values; for 77.5% religion was the main determinant; 67.9% spoke of the nationality of their fathers as the main factor; while 29.8% pointed to the racial type (see Table 3).

The question “To what extent is your nationality important for you?” invited 79.6% “very important” answers and 15.6% “important” (see Table 4).

Table 4

To What Extent is Your Nationality Important for You?

Responses	Percent
Very important	79.6
Important	15.6
Not Very Important	2.8
Unimportant	2.0
Undecided	—
Total	100

The question “Do you attach importance to the nationality of other people?” was negatively answered by 52.4%, 23.6% pay attention to the nationality of people they do not like, while 18.3% of ethnic Kazakhs always pay attention to the nationality of people they deal with (see Table 5).

Table 5

Do You Attach Importance to the Nationality of Other People?

Responses	Percent
Normally not	52.4
Yes, when dealing with people I do not like	23.6
Yes, in all cases	18.3
Refused to answer	2.8
Undecided	2.9
Total	100

According to the poll, nearly 90% of ethnic Kazakhs (89.9%) have no relatives among other nationalities, while 8.1% said that there are inter-ethnic marriages in their families (see Table 6).

Table 6

Do You Have Close Relatives of Other Nationalities?

Responses	Percent
No	89.9
Few	8.1
Many	1.0
Undecided	1.0
Total	100

The polled were asked to answer the question: “How would you feel if a close relative decided to marry a member of another nationality?” The responses revealed that 79.2% of the respondents were dead set against this and would try to prevent it; 10.5% were indifferent; 3.5% did not approve and believed that it would be better avoided if possible; and 6.8% had nothing against it if the future relatives were worthy people (see Table 7).

Table 7

**How Would You Feel If
a Close Relative Decided to Marry a Member of
Another Nationality?**

Responses	Percent
Condemn and would interfere	79.2
Not approve and believe it should be avoided	3.5
Indifferent	10.5
Have nothing against it if future relatives are worthy people	6.8
Approve and encourage because nationality is not the main thing	—
Undecided	—
Total	100

Marriages inside the Kazakh ethnicity predominate (83.2% of the respondents), there are marriages with Uyghurs (7.3%), Chinese (3.8%), Tatars (2.9%), and Dungans (1.9) (see Table 8).

Table 8

**Which Nationalities Predominate
in Mixed Marriages among Kazakhs?**

Responses	Percent
Han Chinese	3.8
Uyghurs	7.3
Dungans	1.9
Tatars	2.9
Marriages only with Kazakhs	83.2
Undecided	0.9

Zhuz-Clan Identity

The native language, religion, culture, history of origin, ideas about the native land, myths, national character, and national cuisine are the most important ethnic features of any diaspora.

The Kazakh diaspora is also dedicated to the principle of purity of blood down to the seventh generation (*zheti ata*),⁸ belonging to a definite *ru*⁹ (clan) that belongs to one of the three *zhuzes* (hundreds),¹⁰ and knowledge of clan history or the genealogical tree—*shezhire* (tree).¹¹

Zheti ata

The Zheti ata tradition, that is, knowledge of genealogy to the seventh generation is an important part of the spiritual culture of the Kazakhs. The question “Do you know your zheti ata?” invited the following answers: 73.0% know their ancestors to the seventh generation; 20.4% know only part; and 6.6% know nothing of their ancestors.

Clans

The biggest number of members of two large clans—the Naymans and Kerei¹²—live in Xinjiang. All the respondents knew the names of the members of their clans by the paternal line, as well as the clans of their close relatives. The following clans were mentioned more frequently: *Aday*, *Alim*, *Merkit*, *Mashan*, *Aksak*, *Karzhau*, *Otep*, *Taylak*, *Maylybay*, *Shubaraygyr*, *Amanbay*, *Sarybura*, *Baybura*, *Kozha*, *Shagay*, *Zholdy*, *Argyn*, *Teristanbaly*, *Zhadyk*, *Kyzay* (*Kuz Molkhy*, *Zhantekey*, *Sherushi*), *Tasbike*, *Uak*, and *Karakas*.

Zhuzes

The origin of the zhuzes and their development are debatable questions. Sultan Akimbekov from Kazakhstan, for example, believes that “the division of the Kazakhs into three zhuzes should not be interpreted as disunity. More likely than not, it was a form of unification of kindred clans within a political compromise on the basis of the Kazakh Khanate, the strongest of them, in the context of a crisis of the Mongol tradition of governance.”¹³ This perfectly fits the diaspora mentality of the Kazakhs, who treat *ru* (clan) and *zhuzes* as factors of their ethnoterritorial unity.

In the Kazakh diaspora, the zhuz is a tool of ethnic survival through the very strict rule of not mixing with other ethnicities down to the seventh generation (*zheti ata*), which is especially important for an ethnicity that finds itself in an alien ethnic milieu.

This tradition is vitally important for the small Kazakh diasporas of Western Europe, hence the tradition of selecting a spouse in Kazakhstan, which has consolidated contacts with the historical homeland.¹⁴

⁸ Zeti ata—names of seven fathers and the knowledge of the family history down to the seventh generation.

⁹ Ru (clan)—a certain group originating from one ancestor in the seventh generation or earlier.

¹⁰ Zhuz—communities of the Kazakhs formed in the distant past based on division along the paternal line into clans (rus). There were three zhuzes—the Elder, Middle, and Younger zhuzes.

¹¹ Shezhire—genealogy among the Kazakhs, a list of relatives along the paternal line.

¹² Naymans and Kerei—two largest clans of the Middle Zhuz.

¹³ S. Akimbekov, *Istoria stepey: fenomen gosudarstva Chinghizkhana v istorii Evrazii*, Tsentr Azii Publishers, Almaty, 2011, p. 566.

¹⁴ According to the author’s field studies of 2005-2014 in Western Europe (Germany, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Austria).

Inside the diaspora, control over marriages, that is, strict observance of the principle of marriages within the zhuz, is highly topical even if the narrow clan limits make inter-ethnic marriages inevitable.

The poll of 450 respondents who live in compact groups in the XUAR showed that 80.5% of them belong to the Middle Zhuz, 12.6%, to the Younger Zhuz, and 2.6% to the Elder Zhuz (see Table 9).

Table 9

Which Zhuz Do You Belong To?

Responses	Percent
Elder Zhuz	2.9
Middle Zhuz	80.5
Younger Zhuz	12.6
Do not belong to a zhuz— <i>aksuyek (kozha, tulengit, etc.)</i>	3.0
Do not know	1.0
Total	100

Some of the responses to the questions about clan affiliation asked during in-depth interviews are reproduced below.

“I belong to Aydak, my granddad moved here during the jut; many Kazakh families fled the country to escape Soviet collectivization... Here Aydaks are few and far between, mainly the descendants of those who fled during the jut of the 1930s. We have many relatives in the Mangistau Region; our roots are there and my relatives go there fairly frequently... Next year I’ll go for a month to Kazakhstan, to the city of Aktau” (a woman of 22).

“I am a Kazakh from Merkit. You know, Shyngyskhan was married to a Merkit woman; I belong to her clan. There are many of us here and we mainly live in Urumqi” (a man of 49).

“There are mainly Naymans around; I am Nayman and my wife is also a Nayman from a different ru” (a man of 37).

Shezhire

The zhuz and clan affiliation is a feature of ethnic identity; each Kazakh is expected to know his/her *shezhire* (genealogical tree), which helps preserve historical memory and keeps the diaspora together. The tree, which consists of clans, is rooted in the distant past and has accumulated all sorts of legends and myths to become the oral history of the people. N. Alimbay has described shezhire as “a genealogically orientated ‘historical autobiography’ of a nomadic ethnicity or, wider still, ‘folklore historiography’.”¹⁵

Aksakals, the older generation, strictly control the knowledge of shezhire. There are posters with shezhire in every Kazakh home, or at least written notes by family members. Similar posters are seen in every cultural center used for all sorts of public events.

¹⁵ N. Alimbay, “The Kazakh Shezhire as a Folklore Category of Historical Sources”, *Kazakh almanagy*, No. 2, 2009, p. 242 (in Kazakh).

Religious Identity

Religion is another important element of ethnic identity. The Kazakhs of China (they are mainly Sunni Muslims) are loyal followers of the traditional maddhab of Imam Abu Hanifah. The remnants of Tengrism are still alive among the Kazakhs in the form of ancestor worship (Aruakh).

There are mainly Uyghur mosques in the XUAR built on the money of local municipalities. There are Kazakh mosques here and there, mainly in the countryside.

The question “What is your attitude to religion?” was asked to identify the level of religiosity among the Chinese Kazakhs: 77.3% of the polled described themselves as faithful members of the community who regularly attend the mosque, observe all rites, enjoinders, and bans, and promote the values of their religion; 21.7% spoke of themselves as faithful Muslims whose involvement in religious life was limited to holidays and vitally important rites, while 1.0% turned out to be non-believers, atheists, and opponents of religion convinced that people should stop believing in God (see Table 10).

All the respondents spoke of themselves as Muslims who did their best to follow all the postulates of their religion.

Here are bit and pieces from in-depth interviews:

“We are mostly Muslims and as such believe in Allah; we do everything in His name” (a man of 25).

“We read namaz, go to the mosque every Friday, fast, and celebrate kurban bayram” (a man of 38).

“As a faithful Muslim, I read namaz five times a day, observe fasts, perform the rite of sacrifice, celebrate all holidays, do my best to attend the mosque every day, and go to the mosque every Friday” (a man of 35).

“We raise our children as faithful and according to the tradition of veneration of elders and respect for the young” (a man of 42).

The question “How often do you attend the mosque?” produced the following answers: 13.0% do not go to the mosque and pray at home; 11.2%, attend the mosque once a month; 6.3%, do not go



The gates of an old Kazakh mosque



A New Mosque

Table 10

What Is Your Attitude to Religion?

Responses	Percent
I am faithful, I belong to the community, attend mosque regularly, fulfill the rights and enjoiments, obey bans, and promote the values of my religion	77.3
I am faithful, but my involvement in religious life is limited to holidays and certain vitally important rites	21.7
I am not faithful, but I follow the traditions of my people and take part in some rites and holidays, and defend our religion	—
I am not faithful and do not take part in religious life, but I respect the religious feelings of the faithful and do not oppose them	—
I have my own faith in non-religious values (civil religion without a traditional god)	—
I am not faithful, an atheist, and an opponent of religion and believe that people should abandon it	1.0
Undecided	—
Total	100

to the mosque because there is no mosque in their settlement; 15.4%, attend services once in six months; and 44.4% attend zhuma namaz (Friday services) every week (see Table 11).

Table 11

How Often Do You Attend the Mosque?

Responses	Percent
Every day	5.8
Once a week	44.4
Once a month	11.2
Once in six months	15.4
Do not go at all because I do not believe in God	—
There is no mosque in our settlement	6.3
Do not attend the mosque because I pray at home	13.0
Undecided	3.9
Total	100

In his interview, the imam (a man of 66) of one of the Kazakh mosques said: “*There is freedom of religion here; no one can limit it because it is proclaimed by the Constitution. Now we have 28 mosques; in some regions there are many of them; in others, there are fewer mosques. We plan to build a mosque in Urumqi, so far Uyghurs and Kazakhs attend the same mosque.*”

Mosques serve as traditional meeting places for Muslims; normally they get together for Friday services (zhuma-namaz). In Urumqi, there are mostly Uyghur mosques, while the settlements with a predominantly Kazakh population have Kazakh mosques.

Linguistic Identity

Let us look at the use of different languages in the social-communicative milieu of the Kazakh diaspora. Today, the Kazakh language in China uses Arab script; there are no dialects, which makes it much easier to understand each other even if Kazakhs are separated by thousands of kilometers. The Kazakh language has accumulated a lot of foreign words, inevitable in a language developing far from its historical home.

I have divided the languages used by the Kazakh diasporas in Western Europe (Great Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark) as well as Turkey, China, Russia, Central Asia, Saudi Arabia, the U.S., Mongolia, and the CIS into the following:

- (1) Native Language
- (2) Migration Languages
- (3) Local Language
- (4) Education/Business Language

The Chinese Kazakhs use the Native Language (the Kazakh language); Local Language (Chinese, Uyghur, and Mongolian), and Education/Business Language (Turkic, Russian, etc.).

The native language is used in the territories with compact Kazakh populations. All the respondents describe Kazakh as their native language.

The local language of the country where Kazakhs live is used in all spheres of the social-communicative system; its use depends on the ethnic policies pursued by the local government. In China, for example, this group consists of three languages: *Chinese*, the state language; *Uyghur*, the language of the largest ethnic group in China; and *Mongolian*, the language of the border regions with a nearly 150 thousand-strong Kazakh diaspora.

Education/Business Language is acquired in the country of residence. The Kazakhs of China use Turkic, Russian, and other languages in this capacity.

There are migration languages in the communicative system of the languages of the Kazakh diaspora that moved away from the XUAR. The migration languages were expanded by Chinese, Uyghur, and Mongolian, as well as the languages and dialects of Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Tibet, India, and other countries in which Kazakhs live. These languages are used in everyday life and in all spheres of Kazakh businesses.

Here is an illustration of the above. One of the respondents of the poll carried out among the Kazakhs of Saudi Arabia was an ethnic Kazakh born in the XUAR. His family emigrated to Pakistan through Tibet and India and spent a lot of time in Afghanistan. He knew his native language, as well as 12 other languages, including English, Chinese, Uyghur, Urdu, Pashto, Dari, Turkish, Arabic, and dialects of the countries of exodus. His vocabulary was limited to his needs as a merchant.¹⁶

The Kazakhs who migrate from China to other countries (mostly Turkey, the U.S. and Western Europe) use the Chinese and Uyghur languages as migration languages.

The question "What other languages do you know?" produced the following answers: Chinese (89.0% of ethnic Kazakhs); Uyghur (75.5%); Mongolian (45.6%); and Russian (4.5%). The respondents also knew, to a certain extent, *Turkish, English, French, Uzbek, Tatar, Arabic, and German*.

The Kazakhs of Xinjiang mainly use Chinese, Uyghur, Mongolian, and Russian.

- The *Chinese language* is the official language of the People's Republic of China; members of the older generation living in remote villages know it much worse than other Chinese Kazakhs.

¹⁶ According to field studies carried out by the author in Saudi Arabia (Jidda, Mecca, and Medina) in 2008.

- The *Uyghur language* is a common language used by Kazakhs who live among Uyghurs, the numerically largest ethnicity (10 million people).
- The *Mongolian language* is used in the borderland area; it was developed at all times. There are about 100 thousand Kazakhs (mainly of two big clans—the Naymans and Kerei, who also live in the XUAR) living in the Bayan-Olgi Aymak of Mongolia.
- The *Russian language* was inherited by the Kazakhs from the period of active relations between the Soviet Union and China in the twentieth century. It was taught in the schools and higher educational establishments of China; large groups of Chinese students studied in the Soviet Union. Today, it is widely used by businessmen in the territories bordering on the

China-Kazakhstan, China-Kyrgyzstan, China-Tajikistan, and China-Russia corridors.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when Kazakhstan started developing close trade relations with its neighbors, many businessmen started learning Russian. It was and remains the language of trade contacts primarily in the border areas, of which the XUAR is one.

Bi-lingual Kazakhs (Kazakh and Russian) are more and more frequently invited to fashionable shops of the top price range frequented by Russian-speaking customers.¹⁷

Kazakhs are a usual sight at big markets geared toward foreign customers; they have a good command of their native and Chinese languages, which makes it easier to serve all customers, Kazakhs included.

The need for the Russian language is promoted by frontier migrations for all sorts of reasons: visits to relatives and friends, education, partnership relations, business trips, etc. Those who want to live in Kazakhstan and who are socially active study Russian while living in China.

In recent years, China and Turkey have been steadily developing their bilateral relations, which has made *Turkish* a highly popular language. Some of the respondents said that they knew and used it.



Adverts at a computer market popular among CIS businessmen



Inscription in Kazakh written in Arabic script

¹⁷ According to field studies carried out by the author in the XUAR in 2010-2014 in the places of compact Kazakh settlement.



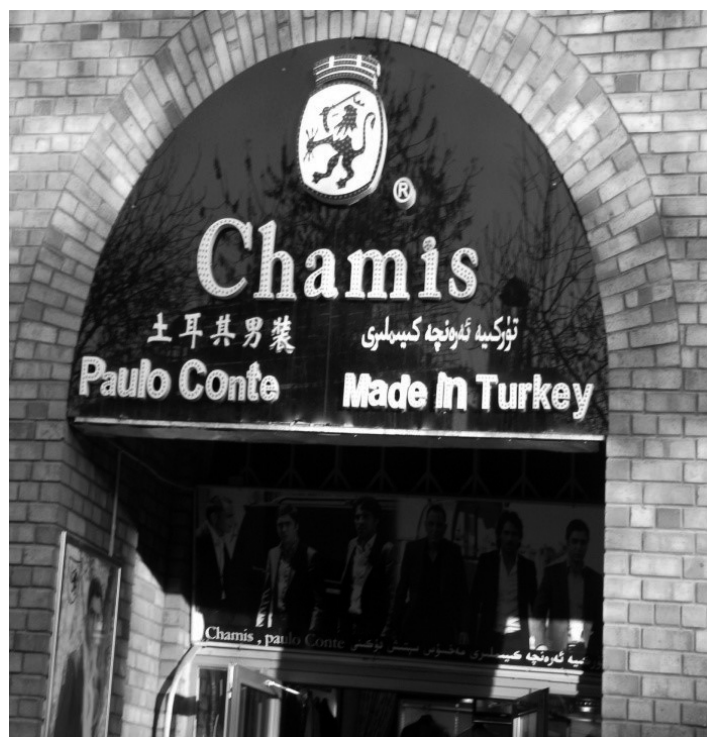
Signs of the presence of Turkish business in the Trading Quarter Da-Bazar (Eastern Bazar), Urumqi

Kazakh and Turkish belong to the same language groups, which helps Kazakh businessmen do business with their Turkish colleagues.

On the whole, the Chinese Kazakhs are bilingual, about which Prof. Gulnara Mendikulova, prominent student of the Kazakh diaspora, has written in her *Kazakhskaia diaspora: istoria i sovremenost* (The Kazakh Diaspora: Past and Present).

Any diaspora is inevitably confronted with the problem of preserving its language as the main vehicle of culture and an ethnic marker.

K. Esimova, who studies China, believes that the continued function of the Kazakh language presents a problem: "The huge amount of money poured into bilingual education, the advantages of bilingual education widely promoted through the media, and the encouragement of the best pupils and students at schools that cooperate with the richest regions have attracted 90% of the Kazakh



children to bilingual schools. This creates real possibilities and, at the same time, leads to the Sini-fication of the non-Han population.”¹⁸

R. Ayyp, Executive Director of the Zhebeu Public Organization, has described this as follows: “We cannot say that the social status of the Kazakhs in China is unfavorable, however their national situation cannot but cause concern. Their national future is dim. About ten years ago, 90% of Kazakhs could be educated in the Kazakh language. Today, 90% of Kazakhs are educated only in Chinese. Respected teachers have to leave schools because they do not know Chinese; teachers with a perfect command of the language preserve their jobs; others are sent away to do manual work. The number of hours of the Kazakh language is shrinking, together with TV and radio broadcasts in Kazakh.”¹⁹

It should be said that the policy of bilingualism introduced in national schools in the last four to five years will cut down the volume of the use of the Kazakh language; this policy (*kos til*) is being actively introduced from the very first year of study in Kazakh schools.

Sinification as a national program in China is a pragmatic project: the process of active modernization of the country’s western part will sooner or later affect the local Kazakhs: those with inadequate or no command of Chinese will be pushed out of active life. Today, knowledge of Chinese makes it easier for Kazakhs to find good jobs. To deal with this problem, the authorities must demonstrate flexibility, while the Kazakhs must be ready to adjust to inevitable modernization.

The answers to the question “Are you concerned about the present and future of your native language?” revealed that 61.5% of ethnic Kazakhs are concerned, 32.7% are mildly concerned, and only 5.8% remained unperturbed (see Table 12).

Table 12

Are You Concerned about the Present and Future of Your Native Language?

Responses	Percent
Yes, very much concerned	61.5
Mildly concerned	32.7
Not concerned	5.8
Total	100

The question “What might interfere with the continued existence of the Kazakh language among the Chinese Kazakhs?” was asked during in-depth interviews to identify the degree to which the Kazakh language among the Chinese Kazakhs was threatened. The majority believed that preservation and continued development of the Kazakh language might be threatened if China changes its policy in relation to national minorities.

Judging by the following answers received during in-depth interviews, the majority was mainly concerned about the future of their native language.

“Our generation has no problem with knowledge of the Kazakh language: we know it and use it and know no other languages. The youth is in a much more difficult situation: globalization and opened borders make young people willing to be involved in the worldwide space, which requires the knowledge of other languages. There is nothing bad in this, but our young people should realize that knowledge of native language is also required” (a man of 78).

¹⁸ K. Esimova, “Pochemu kazakhi v Kitae sokhranili rodnoy kazakhskiy iazyk, no pochemu teriaut ego segodnia,” *Esquire*, Kazakh journal in China, available at [http://esquire.kz/1737-kazahskiy_kitayskiy], 9 March, 2015.

¹⁹ E. Kapkyzy, “Kitay pytaetsia sokhranit iskusstvo kazakhskogo naroda,” available at [http://www.altyn-orda.kz/esen-gapkyzy-kitaj-pytaetsya-soxranit-isskustvo-kazaxskogo-naroda/], 16 March, 2015.

“It seems that many peoples fear they might lose their native language in a world where English and Chinese dominate” (a man of 35).

Both languages, Chinese, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, and Kazakh, which is a Turkic language, most frequently used by the Chinese Kazakhs are heterogeneous languages. At the same time, the homogeneity of the Kazakh and Uyghur languages means that the Turkic peoples of Xinjiang have no communication problems.

Cultural Identity

Traditions and rites constitute another important element of ethnic identity. The Kazakhs of the XUAR, which is a melee of ethnicities, religions, and culture, are determined to preserve the heritage of their ancestors, which is confirmed by the fact that 99.0% of those asked “Do you know the national Kazakh traditions and customs?” gave positive answers (see Table 13).

Table 13

Do You Know the National Kazakh Traditions and Customs?

Responses	Percent
Yes	92.5
Rather Yes than No	6.5
Rather No than Yes	1.0
No	—
Undecided	—
Total	100

It turned out that 89.8% of the respondents try to strictly follow the customs and traditions, 7.3% observe some of them, while 2.9% turn to them in special cases (weddings, births, burials, etc.) (see Table 14).

Table 14

Do You Follow the National Traditions and Customs?

Responses	Percent
Yes, I try to strictly follow all the traditions	89.8
I observe some traditions	7.3
I turn to the traditions on special occasions (marriages, births, burials, etc.)	2.9
No, I deliberately ignore the national traditions	—
Never thought about it	—
Undecided	—
Total	100

The elders strictly control the ways the diaspora observes all the traditions that are handed down from generation to generation. The respondents had the following to say:

“In our milieu, we observe all the traditions and customs related to births, marriages, and burials” (a man of 49).

“At home, we do everything according to our ancient traditions: we respect our elders, cook Kazakh dishes, and sing Kazakh songs” (a woman of 34).

During the poll, the respondents were asked about traditions related to births, ceremonies (weddings), and burials, as well as name-giving ceremonies.

A large share of the questions dealt with everyday traditions and customs: cooking, home decoration, singing of traditional folk songs, etc.

The answers to these and other questions related to the Kazakhs' cultural identity revealed that the Chinese Kazakhs were preserving their culture and its authenticity. This is related in particular to spiritual values, traditional social, family and clan relationships, rites and festival culture, etc.

Conclusion

The structure of identification of the contemporary Kazakh diaspora is classical and based on ethnic identity; religion (Islam and remnants of Tengrism) is another key identification parameter. Combined, they add sustainability to the entire structure of the identification system of the contemporary ethnic group of Chinese Kazakhs. It should be added that since they share the territory with Uyghurs, Dungans, Tatars, and other Muslim peoples, they also observe the main Islamic postulates.

Knowledge of the zhuz-clan routes (lineages) is one of the factors of ethnic identity that helps to avoid incest, an important circumstance in view of the diaspora's fairly limited numerical strength. This knowledge helps the Kazakhs to find relatives; this is highly important for nomads, since a certain number of the Kazakhs of the XUAR are still nomads or semi-nomads.

Linguistic identity is strongly affected by the official Chinese policy relating to the national minorities. So far, it is pretty loyal: there are Kazakh media and cultural centers, even though bilingual schools have somewhat limited the use of the Kazakh language.

The Chinese Kazakhs are highly tolerant in their relations with their neighbors and yet they have preserved their authentic culture, customs, and traditions. At the same time, they are affected by other cultures; this is especially clear in what they eat every day: their menu includes several traditional Chinese dishes. They used certain Chinese words when speaking their native language.

A careful investigation of the main markers of ethnicity of the Chinese Kazakhs (language, religion, culture, and clan relations) suggests an important conclusion: they have preserved their ethnic identity and demonstrated considerable resistance to assimilation.

The fairly large numerical strength of the diaspora, its compact settlement, high internal solidarity, and the consistent nationalities policy pursued by the authorities of the People's Republic of China have allowed the Kazakhs to preserve their structure, language, customs, and traditions. They use their native language, profess Islam, strictly follow zhuz-clan relations, and can freely follow the national traditions and religious rites. They have their cultural centers, which not only bring the Chinese Kazakhs closer, but also help to maintain ties with their historical homeland.

The policy Beijing is pursuing in relation to national minorities (Chinese Kazakhs being one of them) is one of the factors of their development. The Kazakh diaspora has cultural centers, the media (newspapers, journals, radio and TV channels, Internet portals, etc.) and also publishes books by Kazakh academics, etc.

The Kazakhs living on both sides of the common Chinese-Kazakh border maintain ties with their relatives.

Ethnicity is a far from simple phenomenon, which is never static. Its components and levels are strongly affected by external and internal factors; the rapid economic modernization of the western part of China populated by Kazakhs stands a good chance of becoming one such factor: it might change the region's makeup and social institutions.
