

## ONE NATION-DIFFERENT FATES: KAZAKHSTAN IN PURSUIT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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**Brief meaning:** *This article provides analysis of experience which modern Kazakhstan went through in process of determination of its own identity and place in the world in midst of rising globalization. Attempts to restore and safeguard the national identity become common practice in post-soviet countries including Kazakhstan. The transition from soviet identity to its own identity and recognition of being “Kazakhstani” proved to be quite challenging. This article focuses on problems of cultural self-recognition in Kazakhstan, in pursuit of its own unique identity through overcoming barriers that resulted during course of historical development artificially raised by Kazakhs themselves.*

Today Kazakhstan is one of the largest states in Central Asia boasting with developed economy and a stable political situation. Twenty years of independence allowed Kazakhs to evaluate and perceive their own history and themselves in a different light.

Abatement of the main signs of national identity - traditional mode of life resulted in deterioration of culture and language, which inflicted severe damages to cultural memory. The first a half of the XX century was marked for Kazakhstan by the difficult, erratic events which lead to almost irreversible consequences for the Kazakh's cultural identity: collectivization, Famine-Genocide, mass political repressions. Destruction of ethnic consciousness at the most different levels resulted in loss of national nomadic space, deaths of thousands of Kazakhs – bearers of traditions and calculated destruction

of intellectual elite by government. Despite all efforts, the subsequent three generations of Kazakhs were not able to completely heal the scar left more than seventy years ago.

How to overcome this traumatic “experience” ? What it steps should be taken right now to find the most reasonable way to create a new identity, without destroying and without denying the own history? And what role should be assigned to culture? We will try to find answers to these questions in this article.

Authors do not aim to criticize existing historical events or to try to make the adjustments in the historical chronicle. The basis of this article is a sociocultural analysis of modern Kazakhstan as a juncture of two Kazakh mentalities those hundred years apart from each other.

Kazakh nomadism began in times of the Indo-Iranian tribes, synthesizing in themselves achievements of Saks and later Turkic and Mongolian culture and was developing rapidly until the XIX century. A gradual change in cultural values Kazakh nomads began with the joining Kazakh Khanate to the Russian Empire. "It is obvious that one of the means of swaying people to their side was that Russia incepted in the minds of people on the outskirts of empire imperial ideas, immersed them in the imperial political culture, skillfully using audio-visual, sensory channels of perception. Another way of retaining people was a change of lifestyle. Gradually, Russia accustomed nomadic people on outskirts to grain foods, including grain and flour in the salaries of the nobility. Russia systematically accustomed nomads to the urban way of life, arranging magnificent receptions of nobility in cities. This made immediate impact. Within a few years kazakh nobility began to build mansions, equip stationary place of residence, to furnish the house in the European style" [1].

By such methods the Russian Empire "accustomed" nomads to the "imperial culture". One of the worst parts of this transition was the seizure of the best herding pastures of the Kazakhs. Thus, in the late XIX - early XX century nomadic Kazakhs do not have the right to move freely around traditional nomadic routes as the reform of 1867-1868's lands of Kazakhstan were declared state property of the Russian Empire, and actively promoted immigration policy. Traditional way of life of Kazakhs was gradually deformed. Land deficit provoked settling of Kazakhs. At the same time "of the many historical records

compiled by government officials, which can hardly be suspected of sympathizing with the autochthonous inhabitants of the vast steppe, it is clear that the Kazakhs have repeatedly raised the issue of the development of the provisions in the current legislation that would guarantee protection in real life land interests of the indigenous population" [2].

By the beginning of the XIX century due to the policy of the Russian Empire the intertribal conflicts become more frequent in the Junior Zhuz [3] that led to the economic crisis and massive devastation of the Kazakhs. Whole villages of Kazakhs crossed the border line on the Russian territory. Out of despair, many Kazakhs tried to get into the Cossack troops. "Since 1846 the Siberian troops were allowed to take in Kazakhs. But for Kazakhs the easiest way to get into the army was through baptism" [4]. The basic need of food forced people to convert to Orthodoxy, which led to a change in lifestyle, entering into a completely different cultural environment. Thus Kazakh started becoming "Russian".

Imperial Russia fought a smart and flexible policy of "Christianization" of the Kazakh population within the ethnic group, "the missionaries were operating in Steppes very carefully. They took initially waiting position and did not start from the open preaching, trying to calm all those who feared forcible baptism. In the first period missionaries have been studying the Kazakh language, the history of Islam, became acquainted with the peculiarities of nomadic life prepare for the possibility of theological disputes" [4]. As a rule, missionary activity was conducted with bankrupt Kazakhs.

Radical change in the history of the

development of the Kazakh society, which occurred in the early twentieth century, forced to completely change all the parameters of the existence of society. There was an obvious incompatibility of the nomadic societies with the Soviet social ideal that gave rise to the plan of forced collectivization of the indigenous population of Kazakhstan. Using “persuasion” policies former nomads instead of steppes of freedom were offered city life with the industrial landscape and instead of nature they were left with technological environment. This has borne fruit from 1926-1939 years the republic’s population increased by 2.6%, while the city population by 268%. Terrible in its essence collectivization gave the opportunity to speak about the humanitarian disaster of the 1930s, where the “death toll of famine was 1,798,400 ethnic Kazakhs, or 46.8% of the total Kazakh population” [5]. Collectivization caused the final blow to the traditional livestock farming in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries [6]. “The tremendous reduction in livestock and the subsequent famine undoubtedly created the conditions for irreversible sedentarisation Kazakhs. Radically disrupting the social balance by dragging ancestral group in the specified areas negatively affecting the transfer of traditions and memories of older generations, forced sedentarisation for Kazakh society has become a fundamental turning point and, to some extent, forced deculturation [7].

Although by the end of the Soviet period, livestock breeding in the region has been upgraded to a certain extent, at least, in terms of technology. However, it has been modernized in Soviet-style, meaning

the worst and least efficient way, at great human, social and environmental losses due to government’s overkill subsidies and total disregard for the natural factor. For example, in Kazakhstan, the number of livestock exceeded the optimal, and this has led to overgrazing and pastures degradation. Even if the Soviet Union were to survive the collapse this state of affairs could not continue any longer [8].

Without exaggeration it can be said that another part of the tragedy of the Kazakh steppe during the XX century was the Stalinist repressions. In the early 30-ies there were fraudulent political processes conducted all over USSR. The extermination of the representatives of the indigenous nationality was the destruction of the main carriers of the gene pool of the Kazakh people. Under the axe fell, primarily two categories: simple nomads - the keepers of traditions, who did not want or did not know how to change their lifestyle and thoughts; and the brightest of intellectuals - the owners of the spiritual potential feeding nomadic culture” [9].

Repression was blown to frightening enormous proportions. Repressions even reached the “traditional knowledge holders” - Kazakh shamans-”baksi”, which J. Assmann calls special carriers of cultural memory [10].

During this period, the trend of migration had been strengthened, and about a million ethnic Kazakhs were forced to migrate from their historic homeland to neighboring countries. It was the first path of formation of the Kazakh Diaspora, but there was also a second way: “creation of state borders separated part of the kazakh people and made it difficult to communicate with the

main ethnic masses” [11], this process in science is called irredentism [12]. Thus, in the second half of the XIX century after the establishment of the Russian-Chinese border part of Kazakhs who had been wintering in the former Qing Empire territory were in the allegiance of China. Subsequently, in 1916 after the suppression of the anti-colonial rebellion in 1932-1934. During dispossession, collectivisation and famine some Kazakh tribes migrated from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang and took Chinese citizenship [13]. The main concentration of the Kazakh migrant fell on Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, Mongolia and China.

Due to the special historical and political circumstances, one nation was artificially “split” into two parts “repatriates” and “local”, which naturally provoke the break of once united culture in two, conventionally called “oralman” and “local” culture. Both of these cultures developed independently of each other, in the conditions where they could not communicate between each other due to “iron curtains” of the Soviets.

From the period of independence of Kazakhstan in the 1990s, the repatriation of Kazakhs to their historical homeland was declared one of the priorities of the migration policy of Kazakhstan. In the framework of this policy the fundamental legislative documents were adopted: The concept of repatriation ethnic Kazakhs to their historical homeland [14] and the Law “On Migration” [15]. The concept emphasizes the role of Kazakh repatriates as a key factor of «increase of natural population growth, improvement of the demographic situation in the country” [16].

For the years 2009-2011 the Government of Kazakhstan has developed and adopted a new program for immigrants “Nurly Kosh”. The concept of “oralman” (translated into Kazakh means “repatriate») is unique and in world practice is unknown [17]. According to the latest data, the number of repatriates’ oralman-kazakhs in Kazakhstan has exceeded 700 thousand people [18]. If we consider the indigenous population in Kazakhstan itself there are more than 9 million, 700,000 is an impressive number and we hope that the number of repatriates will grow each year.

Independent Kazakhstan - dream of ancestors, embodied today. A dream that did not come easy. From the 90s with the flows of migration of ethnic Kazakhs far abroad formed a third social group - oralmans (repatriates). The Government of Kazakhstan is trying to take certain measures for their social adaptation and initial economic support (in the form of the issuance of land, migration quota, lump sums, etc.). But for the time being these measures are not enough. Many of the repatriates join the ranks of the unemployed. Within the project “Nurly Kosh”, developed for the successful integration of oralmans in Kazakhstan society, stipulated the development of macro zones - small towns - satellites of major cities. Oralmans themselves interpreted this idea wrongly, “the idea of separation of oralmans from locals in reservations, which in turn nefariously influenced the behaviour and thinking of repatriates. Hence, the problem in communication between repatriates and the local population continues to grow. There is a strong illusion that repatriates have that they are not perceived as individuals and



ethnic bearers, which explains their lack of tolerance of other nationalities. The situation is aggravated by the desire of repatriates to “settle” in already densely populated and highly labour sufficient regions (South Kazakhstan, Mangistau, Almaty and Zhambyl regions), which increases social tensions. “The difference in mentality is one of the main key factors of ambiguous and sometimes negative attitude towards oralmen [19].

So how do you rectify the formula given the current cultural situation in Kazakhstan? What is the way out of this situation? Cultural trauma - is a reality, our current problem. Another question is how to deal with it. One option is: to search for “guilty” and automatically recognize them as a public enemy and it is close to creation of the new mythology and the desire to “rewrite” history [20]. The other - is to follow the example of Germany that after acknowledgement of the Holocaust tragedy and the analysis of the events, they admitted their guilt and made thoughtful and conscientious amendments that were needed to be made [21]. And the third way: as proposed by the Kazakh art critic R.A. Ergalieva, refer to the experience of European culture, which constantly reconnect with the world of evangelical values (except, of course, the postmodern era). “Multiple reflection of own basic spiritual idea led to the development and differentiation in levels of consciousness, from the standpoint of which can be discussed as a type, with all of advantages, features and shortcomings of the European way of learning and building a life” [22] in the modern era. In this era European culture has realized values of Christianity in the various theories of scientific and technical

progress, the teaching of human rights and active creative personality of the individual.

For Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations sources of this abundant energy are spiritual layers of Turkic culture. “The oldest, the main and sacred idea for a Turk” is the idea of “original harmony, kinship and union of man and the nature” should become a leitmotif in the revival of the Kazakh culture. “Developing in different ways, shapes and forms of modern culture this cardinal idea is trying to translate into painting and sculpture, films and music the diversity of Tengrian belief, mythology and folklore. Kazakh culture can solve the problem of the revival of the national culture to its past (the original state), its spiritual soil and might even bring something unique to the world’s culture. As a result, such a spiritual vector designated by the words “Forward to the past” which provides opportunities to the growth of culture and gives hope for brighter future, using their own unique spiritual heritage in the cultural space of the world [22].

This process of “forward in the past,” or “The Way Home”, gloriously begun in 80-90s of last century continues in the cultural situation in Kazakhstan today. It is not chaotic, but “quite, calm and officially legalized. The search for identity is no longer a bother for the government on contrary it is now entirely supported at the state level [22]. “This clearly shows the state program “Cultural Heritage” (2004-2011), the ratification in December 2011 by Kazakhstan the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Paris, 17 October 2003) and the presidential program of historical research

“The people in the flow of history” (2014-2016 years). Static condition allows us to look at this process more meaningful, highlighting “two streams of its interpretation”. One of them is marked by a deep sincerity of the authors that the presence of skill leads to the creation of genuine artistic masterpieces and the other being opportunistic reflection of the mainstream, reproduce ethnic values and archetypes household, cultural, historical tradition at all social levels from the ideological to the philistine [22].

Namely, “the implantation stage of identification signs”, should be called overriding cultural mechanism to overcome the traumatic experience of modern culture of Kazakhstan. In this situation, where there are two “Kazakh” cultures, it could be a cornerstone; each of them has something to “learn” from one another. So, to paraphrase, the famous words of B. Disraeli that “one nation could be divided into two nations - the nation of the rich and the poor, each of them has its own culture” [23] in our case our nation is divided into “locals” and repatriates, and each of them have “their own” Kazakh culture. This fact is noted in the review of the International Organization for Migration (Almaty, 2006), although repatriates have the same roots with the local-Kazakhs, there is a difference in culture and customs. This is because the repatriates were able to preserve the traditional Kazakh culture and lifestyle, while Kazakhs in Kazakhstan have adapted, firstly, to the effects of the Soviet influence, and the recent changes that have occurred in the transition to a market economy [24]. It appears to be that the potential of both cultures is enough to restore the cultural

memory: repatriates as carriers of traditional culture, and the local Kazakhs as carriers of “modernized” culture.

As a result of extensive research conducted by scientists from the Kazakh Institute of History and Ethnology named after C. C. Valikhanov in Mongolia (2003-2013 years), “it was revealed that the Kazakhs of Mongolia, despite the rather prolonged isolation from the main ethnic array preserved many features of traditional culture and household, which disappeared under the Soviet rule of Kazakhstan back in 1950-60 years. Large number of people still wields the traditional techniques and culture of cattle breeding which remained in its pure, complex form. In this regard, Western Mongolia is like a museum of traditional Kazakh culture in the open air” [25].

S. Azhigali states that: The same way preserved not only archaic layers of traditional lifestyle (nomadic way of life), but also a system of spiritual support of ethnicity” many old lexical forms and expressions of language, music and songs from the distant past (developed as a folklore), ceremonial and celebratory culture, hunting with eagles (hunting birds), traditional Kazakh crafts and clothing, the traditional cuisine in its original form (salting and drying meat for its long-term storage, etc.), “traditional calendar, astronomy, veterinary medicine etc - remains relevant, because they were in demand in the daily life of herdsmen” [26].

Almost a similar situation with the Chinese Kazakhs, that happened to be within the reach of territorial borders of “China” Kazakhs in general live in the Ili-Kazakh Autonomous Region (Altay, Ili,

Tarbagatai districts) in the Kazakh-Mure (in Sangju-Dungan District), Kazakh-Barkol (in Hamiyskom District) Xinjiang Autonomous District and Kazakh-Aksai Autonomous District in Gansu Province [27]. In another research project, a group of scientists from the Institute of Literature and Art named after M. O. Auezov carried out complex expedition to China (2013).

The results, which showed the traditional life of the Kazakhs in China which undergone almost no fundamental changes. In the villages they still use many of the things that now we in Kazakhstan can only see in museums and history books. Picturesque handmade yurts with all necessary natural attributes that fits well into the modern landscape of China [28].

The prevailing number of repatriates and immigrants come from China and Mongolia. The authors carried out a field study of crafts and cultural traditions of Kazakh repatriates from China, compactly living in the village Tolkyn Enbekshikazakh district of Almaty region. Many of the repatriates, especially the women of the middle generation aged from 40 to 50 years old have no education. Because of this, women of this age are housewives and engaged in traditional crafts: manual production of carpets - syrmaks and sewing of Kazakh national dresses. Therefore, similar living conditions of ethnic Kazakhs in Mongolia and China with Kazakhs of the XIX century, and in many ways almost identical lifestyle helped to conserve the traditional culture, and to preserve the cultural identification signs. Among the youth of Kazakh repatriates traditional culture is not very popular, on contrary they seek to integrate into the fast-moving “fashionable”

life of modern Kazakhstan as soon as possible. Therefore, the source of “traditional culture” is finite, because of the media; each year will deplete the potency of the source until the oralmans assimilate culture-wise with “modern” Kazakhs.

Speaking of the potential of the local culture in the manifestation of national identity, first you need to talk about a progress that already was made. Local culture absorbed new cultural impulses: “it was enriched with artistic and spiritual experience of other nationalities” in spite of all the circumstances with help of “innovation and experimentation” to become recognisable in the world of Art. On the way of historical unification of Kazakh people, harmonious connection between the two cultures was essential in the process of restoration of the national identity of modern Kazakhstan.

This partnership is especially relevant for young people, in fact it is always the youth that catalyses all social changes. However, V. I. Dobrenkov and A. I. Kravchenko noticed: “effective means of overcoming cultural trauma has not been invented yet. But still we will try to identify practical ways to overcome the traumatic experience that can fit into the concept of sustainable development adopted at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development “Rio + 20” (20-22 June 2012). One of the main factors of Kazakhstan’s transition to sustainable development is development of human capital. Therefore, the “timeless importance of research of sustainable development, and education has to be treated as a decisive factor successful development of a nation“ [29].

In the case of Kazakhstan regarding to

human capital development, we can see a lot of effort put into education in order to rise a more skilful generation. New approaches to the design of national education should focus not only on the development of mainstream education but also the development of creative industries. Creative industries are a growing sector which gains more influence on European and global economies in terms of job creation, entrepreneurship, growth and innovation. Creative industries contribute to the creation of new means of communication, new ways of interacting new ways of entertainment, as well as new ways of learning and last but not the least - the new way of doing business [30]. In the development of the creative industries Kazakhstan can seek help from more experienced countries like UK, Denmark and other Nordic countries, where government supports the development of the creative industries. After all the creative industries in the Nordic countries like Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden traditionally considered as leaders in the field of design and creativity demonstrates their commitment to the cultural, social and economic welfare of the country.

The first in the list of major organizations in the field of creative industries are universities in the Nordic countries. In Kazakhstan there are a lot of universities of culture and art, on the basis of which could build our creative industries, which include a wide range of initiatives that have creative nature from traditional arts, crafts, music and theatre, design, fashion, video, audio and multimedia products. This sufficient starting materials and resources which will enable students to create creative products that

can find successfully implementation in the market and can bring a positive change to our oil-oriented economy. Kazakhstan will start to produce the goods in which Kazakhstan traditionally has a comparative advantage. An example of this is the experience of Turkey 50-60-s of XX century, when ethnic Kazakhs “brought back to life” the craftsmanship of leather goods: today Turkish coats, jackets and various leather products are popular all over the world. This business is still called Kazakh business in Turkey.

The benefits of the creative industries can be reaped not only by the education sector, which receives additional sources of income, but also by business. Because in world practice it is considered that small and medium entrepreneurship in the field of creative industries is a catalyst of success for the sector, and source for human resources [31]. Macro-zones for repatriates that are described in the program “Nurly Kosh” might serve as a good base for creative industries, where the Institute of traditional craftsmanship in the form of small and medium-sized businesses could flourish. That is where because of their deep connection with old traditional world and traditional craftsmanship should be the main striking force. Formation of the creative industries through small and medium business of will provide employment and social adaptation of the population and especially the youth, and also the solution to the problems, such as stability of economic growth not only for certain categories of people, but for the country as a whole.



## CONCLUSION

Now it is important to combine the forces of professionals in the artistic field, economists, psychologists and marketers who have studied the creative industries throughout. The youth already has the necessary knowledge to give in to their creative desires even in the walls of their high school, universities by attending art studios that are mandatory in modern educational institutions in Kazakhstan. These small cells will continue to develop into creative clusters and finally into full-fledged creative industries, forming Kazakhstan's "bank" of creative and intellectual potential. Now everyone speaks of "self-determination", "national component of culture", "globalization" and "search for identity". Creative industries are able to transform aspirations into reality based on intangible resources: tradition, history, cultural heritage and creative abilities. Only then the brand "Made in Kazakhstan" will be really recognized and valued in the world.

The twentieth century for Kazakhstan is a century of serious trials where the strength of the national spirit was tested and ethnic and cultural identity was lost and then found again. Since its beginning the Kazakhs had to endure a lot: colonization, forced collectivization, migration, famine, political repression, deportation, national differentiation taking place under the banner of the Soviet ideology and more. Each of these "episodes" has caused deep scars, mutilating and sometimes even distorting cultural memory. The consequences of which now largely determine different aspects of our lives, continuing to break our society. For almost hundred years one culture was

divided into two, they finally met each other in independent Kazakhstan. Subtle cultural differences of repatriates and "locals" gave us the opportunity to discuss possible ways to overcome the traumatic experience of the Kazakh culture and reasonable method of forming the new Kazakh identity, better use of the enormous potential of both cultures: native traditional and new "westernized" Kazakh.

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