

Mongolian Kazakh Diaspora: Study of Largest Ethnic Minority in Mongolia

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Abstract

The arrival of ethnic Kazakhs into the Mongol territory began in 1860s, mainly from Xinjiang region of China. Since then there has been a peaceful co-existence between Mongols and Kazakhs in Mongolia until late 1980s when deterioration in ethnic relations began to be noticed. In the early 1990s there began a process of migration of Mongolian Kazakhs to Kazakhstan. But after 1994 it came to a sudden halt only to witness the beginning of a re-migration back to Mongolia. Despite such phenomenon in the activities of Mongolian Kazakhs it is noteworthy that in Mongolia they always enjoyed a comparatively high status in the society. It is in this context that this paper seeks to analyse the socio-economic and political status of the Kazakhs, the largest ethnic minority group in Mongolia. While doing so it makes an objective investigation into the background of the origin of Kazakhs in Mongolia, their migration to the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan and re-migration back to Mongolia. Besides, it also examines whether issues related to Mongolian Kazakhs remain to be a key factor in facilitating both the ongoing and future development of friendly ties between Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

Key words: Kazakh diaspora, ethnic Kazakhs, Mongolian Kazakhs, oralmans, migration, re-migration, kurultai, linguistic and cultural identity, autonomy, pastoralism, inter-religious tension, nomadic identity

The recent visit of Mongolian President N. Enkhbayar to Kazakhstan from 13 to 15 August 2007 is indicative of further development of relationship and cooperation between Mongolia and Kazakhstan.¹ Accompanied by a high-level business delegation Enkhbayar's visit has marked not only improving the economic and trade relations between the two countries but also strengthening their diplomatic ties, which were established on 22 January 1992. This is more so because there are common borders between Mongolia and Kazakhstan apart from ethnic Kazakhs forming the largest minority population of Mongolia. This factor has always played a major role in the development of ties between the two countries. However, the Kazakhs of Mongolia or the Mongolian Kazakhs fall in the category of a myriad of lesser studied things in the area of Mongolian Studies. Whatever little research work we come across on the subject collectively reveals that there has been a peaceful co-existence between Mongols and Kazakhs in Mongolia since the arrival of the first lot of ethnic Kazakhs into the Mongol

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1. For more details on Mongolian President's visit to Kazakhstan in August 2007, see G. Ganbayar, "Enkhbayar visits Kazakhstan," *UB Post* (Ulaanbaatar), 22 August 2007.

territory as far back as in 1860s, primarily from the present Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region of China. But, in the late 1980s when democratisation process began in Mongolia there has been a worsening situation in ethnic relations due to increasing nationalism among Kazakhs and Mongols alike. Some Kazakhs then demanded autonomy or even independence for one province of Western Mongolia where they form the majority-Bayan-Ölgii *aimag*. A few years later in the early 1990s there began a process of migration of the Kazakh diaspora of Mongolia to the country of their origin i.e., the newly independent Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan.

Yet, as Alexander Diener points out, “for many of those diasporic Kazakhs heeding the call of migration to their historical territory, the Republic of Kazakhstan differs greatly from the homeland they imagined [This was particularly true for the Mongolian Kazakhs].”² These “repatriates” often discovered their dreams of an ethnic homecoming shattered by the reality of Kazakhstan’s “multicultural and largely russified society.”³ Within Kazakhstan they found themselves politically, socially, economically and even culturally marginalized. As a result, after 1994 emigration of Mongolian Kazakhs came to a sudden halt only to witness the beginning of a re-migration back to Mongolia, though on a small scale. Nevertheless, the Kazakhs in Mongolia always enjoyed a comparatively high socio-economic and political status among all the minorities, perhaps due to a single largest factor that both the Mongols and the Kazakhs have one common point, i.e., the nomadic mentality/psychology prevailing in a similar fashion in the two communities.

Background of Kazakh Diaspora in Mongolia

Kazakh diaspora in the Mongol land is said to have originated from frequent waves of migrations due to the circumstances of the day. Ethnically, Kazakhs are of Turkic descent,⁴ who developed a distinct ethnic identity in the late 15th and early 16th

2 . Alexander C. Diener, Kazakhstan’s Kin State Diaspora: Settlement Planning and the *Oralman* Dilemma,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.57, no. 2, March 2005, p. 327.

3 . *Ibid*, pp. 327-328.

4 . Tsedendambyn Batbayar and Sharad K Soni, *Modern Mongolia: A Concise History* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2007), 3rd revd. edn., p.2.

centuries. Initially, Russian imperial expansionism during the 17th-19th centuries led to the displacement of a large number of Kazakhs. Moving eastwards and beyond some Kazakh tribes pushed into the high pastures of Tien Shan (Heavenly) mountains and into Xinjiang region of northwest China where they continued to live a pastoral nomadic lifestyle until the Manchus put pressure on their precious grazing lands. In fact, for the Qing rulers Xinjiang was the first line of defence in the northwest China against foreign intrusion and “the concern for defence was directed both at the Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other tribes of Central Asia and at the Russians who continued their relentless drive to the east.”⁵

However, Xinjiang could not remain isolated from the troubles besetting China due to the Taipei rebellion and other uprisings of the 1850s. China badly needed additional revenue to tackle such uprisings and, therefore, the Qing court raised the taxes on the non-Chinese peoples of the Xinjiang region, which resulted in bringing the predominantly Muslim population to the verge of rebellion.⁶ This might have been one of the reasons that led to the Kazakh migration elsewhere in order to escape the trouble in the region. Besides, heavy snowfall during the close of the 19th century also caused the exodus of a few Kazakh families from Xinjiang to the east of the Altai mountains.⁷ Whatever might have been the reasons it is believed that beginning in the 1860s the Kazakhs from Xinjiang started migrating across the high Altai Mountain passes to enter into the Mongolian territory and settled down in the western part particularly in the areas today known as Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* (province).⁸ Later, some small groups of Kazakhs from the Russian Altai and eastern Kazakhstan fleeing the October revolution of 1917

5. Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia; From 1368 to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp.167-168.

6. *Ibid*, pp.170-171.

7. Baabar, *Twentieth Century Mongolia* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 1999), p.396.

8. See Peter Finke, “The Kazaks of Western Mongolia”, in Ingvar Svanberg, ed., *Contemporary Kazaks: Cultural and Social Perspectives* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1999), pp. 109-110. According to another view, the Kazakhs in Mongolia are mostly Abak-kerei and Naiman Kazakhs who settled in the Altai and Khovd regions, where they rented pasture from the lords of Mongolia during the 1860s as per the Tarbagatai protocol concluded between Tsarist Russia and the Qing Dynasty, see Ts. Baatar “Present Situation of Kazakh-Mongolian Community,” *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs* (Ulaanbaatar), nos.8-9, 2002, p.95.

and the civil war of 1920s in Russia too entered into western Mongolia. It is to be noted that in 1921 when Bogdo Gegen's theocracy was proclaimed in Mongolia,⁹ even a few Kazakhs who were living there expressed their allegiance to him.¹⁰ Further in the 1930s and 1940s there had been few other major Kazakh movements from Xinjiang into Mongolia because of the frequent riots in Xinjiang.¹¹

Evidently, most of the Kazakhs came to Mongolia in the pre-1940 period and also well before the communists came to power in China, since already in 1940 the Mongolian government created a separate administrative unit for the Kazakh minority i.e., the *aimag* of Bayan-Ölgii. An ever-growing influx of Kazakh refugees in to Mongolia began to be witnessed as a result of turbulence in Xinjiang due to the civil war, rebellions and revolts between 1930s and 1940s,¹² and it was Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* that remained a true destination for taking refuge to the fleeing Kazakhs. In July 1942 itself an estimated 359 people from 69 Kazakh families were reported to have fled to Mongolia where "they sought asylum because they were victims of pillage and robbery, and they applied for Mongolian citizenship."¹³ This was followed by another wave of Kazakh migration on a large scale and "within several months more than 2,200 people from 330 families fled to Mongolia and settled down in different areas."¹⁴ However, at the same time China was alleged of attacking Kazakhs fleeing from Xinjiang in to Mongolian territory which was protested in 1944 by the former Soviet Union but the Chinese denied the charges.¹⁵ Over the years by establishing themselves in Mongolia the Kazakhs not only considered the

9. For more on the events in 1921 directly related to Bogdo Gegen who was also called the *Khutukhtu*, the religious head of Mongolia, see Sharad K. Soni, *Mongolia-Russia Relations: Kiakhta to Vladivostok* (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2002), pp.48-52.

10. Baabar, *op.cit*, p.396.

11. For more details see, Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg, "The Kazakhs in Xinjiang", in Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg (eds.), *The Kazakhs of China: Essays on an Ethnic Minority* (Uppsala, 1988), pp.1-106.

12. For more on the situation in Xinjiang during this period, see K. Warikoo, "Muslim Separatism in Xinjiang", *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* (New Delhi), vol.4, nos. 3-4, July-December 2000, pp. 32-34.

13. Baabar, *op.cit*, p.397.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Robert R. Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, (Bloomington, 1964), Part 1, p.258.

country as their home but their extended family also seasonally grazed livestock there which contributed greatly to the benefit of the whole nation.

Apart from Kazakhs there are also a few other ethnic minorities who live in Mongolia. Demographically, Mongolia's total population in 2005 has been recorded as 25,62,4000 (about 2.6 million),¹⁶ a slow but steady growth since the last census was conducted in 2000, which itself had recorded the figure as 23,73,493 (about 2.4 million). This figure is the quadruple of what was the total population at the beginning of the 20th century, i.e., half a million. The major ethnic group in the country is Khalkha Mongols who make up a total number of 19,34,674 or 81.5 per cent of the entire population. Among the remaining ethnic groups, Kazakhs have the largest share with a total number of 1,02,983 or 4.3 per cent of the entire population followed by Durved, Bayad (Bait), Buriad (Buryat), Dariganga, Dzakhchin, and Uriankhai (Tuvan) each representing between 1.1 and 2.8 per cent of the total population.¹⁷

Main Areas of Kazakh Concentration in Mongolia

The ethnic Kazakhs in Mongolia are today concentrated mostly in the country's western region that includes five provinces (*aimags*)- Bayan-Ölgii, Khovd, Uvs, Zavkhan and Gobi-Altai. In sharp contrast to the rest of the country Western Mongolian population is comprised mainly of the Western Mongolian groups of Oirats, and Turkic speaking minorities such as Kazakhs. Under the Manchu-Chinese rule, Mongolia (then known as Outer Mongolia) was divided in to four *aimags* of the Khalkha Mongols and the special district of Kobdo (also known as Sain Jayagato Khan *aimag*) in the far northwest, each divided into several banner (*khoshuu*). While the *khoshuu* of the four Khalkha *aimags* were hereditary territories of the Mongolian nobility, in the special district of Kobdo, most of them were inhabited by specific ethnic or tribal groups belonging to the old

16 . *Mongolian Statistical Yearbook-2005* (Ulaanbaatar: National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2006), p.68.

17 . For main ethnic groups comprising the whole population of Mongolia, see *2000 Population and Housing Census of Mongolia: The Main Results*, p.50 at http://www.nso.mn/census/mainresults/chap_04.pdf

Western Mongol confederation.¹⁸ Following the establishment of the People's Republic in Mongolia in 1924, the *khoshuu* were abandoned and the *aimags* gradually split up into *sums* (districts) and these in turn into *bag* (the smallest Mongol administrative unit). In 1931 the special district of Kobdo was divided into two *aimags*- the Khovd and the Uvs. Further in 1938 when the question of the national minorities in Khovd *aimag* came under discussion of the Mongolian government, it was eventually decided to establish "a completely new democratic administration" for the Kazakh dominated area.¹⁹ Following this decision, in 1940, out of the western parts of Khovd and Uvs *aimags* the Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* was formed as a separate administrative unit for the Kazakh national minority."²⁰

Having a population of 99,112 and covering an area of 45,800 sq. kms. the Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* comprises 2.9 per cent of the whole Mongolian territory with 13 territorial administrative units.²¹ Bayan-Ölgii *aimag*, alone accounts for more than 78.4 per cent of the Kazakh population, thus, apart from being the most numerous, the Kazakhs are the only minority in Mongolia forming the majority of one *aimag*. Moreover, 88.7 per cent of the total population of Bayan-Ölgii city is composed of Kazakhs. Besides, Kazakhs also comprise over 10 per cent of the population in neighbouring Khovd, living primarily in the *aimag* centre, Khovd *sum* (district) where they are a dominant majority, and in Buyant *sum* where they comprise about one-third of the population, and as a smaller minority in other *sums*. In this area, the Kazakhs are said to have started coming in the 1930s, partly from Xinjiang and partly from Bayan-Ölgii.²² While the majority of Kazakhs continue to live in the traditional *aimags* to the extreme west, more recent migration eastward to the urban areas has resulted in significant growth in their numbers, especially in Mongolia's capital Ulaanbaatar. At the time of the 2000 census, 6.3 per cent

18. Owen Lattimore, "Mongolia", in *China Year Book-1938* (Shanghai), p.26.

19. B. Shirendyb et al, *History of the Mongolian People's Republic*, Translated by William A. Brown and Urgunge Onon (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1976), p.343.

20. *Ibid.*, p.344.

21. Yerlan Arynov, "The Kazakh Diaspora in Mongolia", translated from Kazakh by Paul D. Buell at <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~corff/in/Landeskunde/kazakh>

22. Peter Finke, "Common Property to Open Access: Changing Pastoral Land Tenure in Post-Socialist Mongolia", 2000 at <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/documents>

of country's total Kazakh population lived in Ulaanbaatar alone with significant and growing settlement in Darkhan-Uul, Tuv, Selenge, Orkhon, Khentii and Uvs *aimags*.²³ In Ulaanbaatar, whereas the number of Kazakhs increased from 3,200 in 1969 to 5,600 in 1979, it further grew in 1989 to reach the figure of 9,000 thus becoming the second largest ethnic group in the Mongolian capital.²⁴

The Kazakhs also live in the industrial cities of Choibalsan, Darkhan and Erdenet as well as in the coal mining area of Nalaikh District, in *Khoroo-4* (sub-district) which is 90 per cent Kazakh dominated area located near Ulaanbaatar. Most of them are employed in factories besides being in different occupations and working as state-employees in the *aimag* centres. They are said to have left Bayan-Ölgii in the 1960s and 1970s in search of job due to overpopulation in this western *aimag*. A disproportionate number of Kazakhs are also traced among the relatively highly paid workers in the coal mines of north-central Mongolia. These Kazakhs may have come to this area either due to “limited opportunities in the narrow valleys of Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* or government efforts to favour a potentially restive minority, or both”.²⁵ Though a sizeable number of Mongolian Kazakhs in the post-socialist period migrated to Kazakhstan, they still constitute the most numerous ethnic minority group in Mongolia. Infact, a higher birth rate among Kazakhs than any other ethnic groups has been the single most factor for increased percentage of their population until 1989 when a decline began to be witnessed. Whereas the Kazakh population registered an increase from 4.3 per cent in 1956 to 5.9 per cent in 1989, in 2000 it reduced to 4.3 per cent i.e., coming back again to the 1956 level (when the census was conducted for the first time by an established organisation).

According to 2000 Population and Housing Census of Mongolia, the total number of Kazakhs in the country stands at 1,02,983, of which 51,869 are males and 51,114 are females.²⁶ This figure has further been divided into urban and rural areas. The Kazakhs

23. 2000 *Population and Housing Census of Mongolia: The Main Results, op.cit*, p.51.

24. Dashzhav, *Ulaanbaatar xotin xiin am* (Population of the Town of Ulaanbaatar), Ulaanbaatar, 1994, p.30.

25. “Mongols and Kazakhs” at <http://drlee.org/mongol/r43.html>

26. 2000 *Population and Housing Census of Mongolia: The Main Results, op.cit*, p.128.

living in urban areas account for 36,294 including 18,202 males and 18,092 females, while in rural areas they number 66,689 inclusive of 33,667 males and 33,022 females.²⁷ The statistics reveal that although difference between number of Kazakh males and females is very less, there is much difference between Kazakhs living in urban and rural areas. The higher Kazakh concentration in rural areas points to pastoralism as still being the most prevalent occupation among the Kazakhs, though side by side agriculture is also being practiced. These pastoral Kazakhs are said to be “typical” of most herders in the western Mongol region. The *yadilbay* variety of livestock is the prevalent Kazakh breed, which alone accounts for more than 30 per cent of the total livestock.²⁸ Going by the census records of 1956,1963,1969,1979,1989 and 2000, we find that the total number and percentage of Kazakh population in Mongolia are as follows: 1956 - 36,700 (4.3%), 1963 - 47,700 (5.2%), 1969 - 62,800 (5.2%), 1979 - 84,300 (5.3%), 1989 - 1,20,500 (5.9 %), 2000 - 1,03,000 (4.3%).²⁹

The difference in ethnic Kazakh population after 1989 occurred principally due to their migration from Mongolia to Kazakhstan in the early 1990s. There has been a decline of almost 17,500 in the number of ethnic Kazakhs in 2000 while compared to 1989 census figure, though the overall Mongolia’s resident population increased.³⁰ Significantly, there has been a corresponding increase in the proportion claiming Khalkha ethnicity, from about 79 per cent in 1989 to about 82 per cent in 2000. The percentage increase in the Khalkha majority seems to be largely due to the decline in the number of both the Kazakhs as well as the foreign citizens in the period of democratization in Mongolia. In the age structure, it is noticeable that unlike other ethnic groups the Kazakh population is much younger.³¹ Evidently, 42.5 per cent of the Kazakh population falls

27. *Ibid.*, pp.129-30.

28. Arynov, *op.cit.*

29. For the figures of 1956 and 1963 see X. Nyambuu, *Mongolin ugsaatni ziiy. udirgal* (Ethnography of Mongolia and the Mongols: An Introduction), Ulaanbaatar, 1992, p.24; for the figures of 1969 and 1979 see *National Economy of the MPR For 65 Years*, Ulaanbaatar, 1986, p.90; and for the figures of 1989 and 2000 see *2000 Population and Housing Census of Mongolia, : The Main Results, op.cit*, p.50.

30. *2000 Population and Housing Census of Mongolia: The Main Results, op.cit*, p. 50.

31. *Ibid*, p.51.

under 15 years of age as against 35.8 per cent of the overall Mongolian citizens in the same age group.³² The higher fertility rate among Kazakh ethnic group appears to be one of the reasons for the predominance of age group ranging from zero to fourteen years old. However, in the age group 15 to 24, the Kazakh population is 21 per cent which is more or less same as the figure of all Mongolian citizens. Similarly in the age group 25 to 34, Kazakhs form 15.5 per cent as against 17 per cent figure for all Mongolian citizens; in the age group 35 to 44, Kazakhs- 10.1 per cent and all Mongolian citizens- 12.6 per cent; in the age group 45 to 54, Kazakhs- 4.6 per cent and all Mongolian citizens- 5.9 per cent; and in the age group over 55, Kazakhs- 6.7 per cent and all Mongolian citizens- 7.6 per cent.

Migration of Mongolian Kazakhs to Kazakhstan

In the early 1990s, several Mongolian Kazakhs decided to move to the newly independent Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan. Their decision came in the wake of Soviet-style reforms and restructuring through *Iltod* and *Orchilan baigalalt* in Mongolia and the ensuing economic crisis the country had witnessed in the same period. In this stride they were encouraged by Kazakhstan government's willingness to promote Kazakh diaspora by insisting them to move back to their country of origin. This was evidenced at the First World *Kurultai* (assembly) of Kazakh people held in 1992 when the authorities urged ethnic Kazakhs wherever they were to return to Kazakhstan and promised them a number of benefits with simplification in citizenship procedure. As a result, in 1993 the quota for ethnic Kazakhs willing to come to Kazakhstan was fixed to 10,000 families or 50,000 persons. But in the following years it was reduced to 7000 families in 1994 and 5000 families in 1995. Further decline in the immigration quota was revealed during 2000 and 2001 when the Kazakh government fixed it for only 600 families or 3000 persons. A sharp decrease in the immigration quota seems to have been influenced by unchecked migration of a large number of ethnic Kazakhs.

The Kazakh ethnic immigrant is known as *oralman* meaning "one who came back" or "returnee" from across Asia into their homeland. Until 1996, an estimated

32. *Ibid*, p.52.

154,941 ethnic Kazakhs returned to Kazakhstan that included 84,828 persons from other CIS countries, 62,126 from Mongolia, 640 from China and 418 from Afghanistan.³³ However, official data for the period from the end of 1992 to the beginning of 2001 put the figure at a total of approximately 181,400 immigrant Kazakhs, of which 158,400 came under immigration quota.³⁴ The migrants included 106,800 from other CIS countries; 63,900 from Mongolia; 4,800 from Iran; 2,600 from Turkey; 1,100 from China; 771 from Pakistan and 83 from Saudi Arabia.³⁵ In 2003 it was estimated that since 1991 approximately 260,000 ethnic Kazakhs returned to Kazakhstan,³⁶ while in 2005 the official figure reached to 277,000.³⁷ Despite setting each year quota for the number of Kazakhs eligible to return to Kazakhstan, the arrival figure far exceeds the quota. According to International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in 2001 more than 10,000 families arrived in Kazakhstan as against permissible limit of 600 families.³⁸ The migration quota is normally fixed on the basis of financial situation of Kazakhstan and there is also no denying of the fact that the desire to migrate is mainly connected with economic considerations as Kazakh economy is getting better year by year.

Having been described as the “economic power house of Central Asia,” Kazakhstan registered a “double-digit growth” over the three years period before GDP was forecast to rise 8 per cent in 2003.³⁹ Evidently, better economic condition has once again shown signs of positive response from the Kazakh government on several concrete problems related to migration issues. On 23 October 2002, in his opening remarks at the Second World *Kurultai* of Kazakhs, President Nursultan Nazarbayev stressed on the need

33. *US Committee for Refugees: 1997 Country Reports: Kazakhstan* at <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/scasia/1997/kazakhstan.htm>

34. “Large Group of Repatriates Receives Kazakh Citizenship but Problems Remain Acute”, *KIBHR Information Newsletter*, no.3, 1-8 April 2001 at http://www.bureau.kz/bulletin_eng.html

35. *Ibid.*

36. See Alfred Kueppers, “Ethnic Kazakhs Find Titular Homeland to be Economic Haven,” 22 April 2003 at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav042203.shtml>

37. See “Kazakhstan: The Challenge of Sustaining Returnees” at http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=45782&SelectRegion=Central_Asia.

38. Kueppers, *op.cit.*

39. *Ibid.*

to increase quotas for immigration. As such in accordance with 2003 quota 5000 families of ethnic Kazakhs were allowed to settle permanently which further increased to 10,000 families in 2004 and 15,000 families in 2005.⁴⁰ Nazarbayev's statement provides a clear view of his government on resolving as far as possible the problems of *oralmans* when he said:

...the number of those, desiring to come to historic homeplace is much higher. But everyone should understand that the state is unable to resolve all their problems. People come to Kazakhstan over quotas. And the authority branches got a task to do everything possible for the citizens to settle. Kazakhstan has overcome the hardships of transitional period. The country's economic strength has grown. But to make the state richer and stronger is the task [of] those residing in the republic and abroad [and they] have to resolve it together.⁴¹

While commending the Kazakhs living in Mongolia he said that they have preserved their traditions and “*oralmans* from that country have brought to Kazakhstan many interesting traditions.”⁴² At the same time he also noted that numerous centres of Kazakh culture operating abroad should not only focus on their own problem's resolution but also they must contribute to development of contacts with Kazakhstan. Now it remains to be seen that how far Nazarbayev is successful in his effort of creating conditions and bringing Kazakhs around the world together for preserving their cultural heritage and traditions. However, considering the above data the biggest number of ethnic Kazakhs who migrated to Kazakhstan comes from Mongolia. In fact, both Mongolia and Kazakhstan have concluded several agreements to facilitate the return of Mongolian Kazakhs to Kazakhstan where they are given opportunities for employment and housing.⁴³ Under labour contracts they are working as skilled/unskilled labour and also as specialists. They also started working as herdsmen in the rural areas of Kazakhstan since this was thought to be the most suitable job for Kazakhs from Mongolia. Some of the Mongolian Kazakh migrants obtained the status of foreign workers in Kazakhstan and so retained their Mongolian citizenship as

40. See *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 24 October 2002 at http://www.kazpravda/archive/24_10_2002/p_e.html

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. Sharad K. Soni “Perspectives on Mongolia-Central Asia Relations”, in *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* (Calcutta, 1995), p.176.

well. It is to be noted that in the initial period of migration thousands of Kazakhs sold off their assets in Mongolia with a view to settle in Kazakhstan.⁴⁴ In 1995 an inter-state accord was signed between Mongolia and Kazakhstan by which Kazakhs were given a legal right to live in either of the two countries they had chosen.⁴⁵ Perhaps such an accord generated for the first time an opportunity to the Kazakhs living in Mongolia to settle down in a place of their choice. However, some Mongolian scholars demanded that if Mongolian Kazakhs go to Kazakhstan, they should abandon their claims to their land in Mongolia.⁴⁶

On 21 June 2000, President Nazarbayev issued a special decree granting Kazakh citizenship to 1882 Mongolian Kazakhs who settled down in Kazakhstan after emigrating from western Mongolia in the early 1990s.⁴⁷ However, an estimated 30,000 immigrant Mongolian Kazakhs are still awaiting their documents to be fully processed for Kazakh citizenship. It is also to be noted that both the Mongolian and Kazakh governments are seriously involved in negotiating the simplification of procedure for settling citizenship issues and the visa regime for ethnic Kazakhs who want to migrate from Mongolia. But the pace of migration among the Mongolian Kazakhs to Kazakhstan has now declined due to the emergence of quite a new phenomenon i.e., re-migration back to Mongolia since 1994 though in a lesser number. As there are no reliable figures, it is very difficult to estimate the number of these Kazakhs who came back to Mongolia. Even though between 10,000 and 20,000 of them are estimated to have returned to Mongolia during 1994 and 1995. Nevertheless, due to the worsening economic situation in Mongolia in 1996 emigration to Kazakhstan again started mostly from the *aimag* centre of Bayan-Ölgii, though this time not on a large scale.

Significantly, the out migration was more pronounced among the Mongolian Kazakh inhabitants of urban areas while compared to rural areas. Thus, their emigration to

44. K. Warikoo, "Emerging Order in Central Asia", *World Focus*, Vol.14, nos.3-4, 1993, p.8.

45. *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/2214, 30 January 1995.

46. See Suchandna Chatterjee, *Mind and Vision: Perceptions of Reform in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan* (New Delhi: Bookwell, 2006), p.24.

47. See *Kazakh Report*, 23 June 2000 at <http://www.rferl.org/bd/ka/reports/archives/2000/06/230600.html>

Kazakhstan, in a way, reduced the overall urban exodus to rural areas, which was commonly documented in other provinces of Mongolia following the economic transition. Economic problems marred the Kazakh city-dwellers so much so that the impoverished ones preferred to migrate to Kazakhstan than becoming pastoralists again by merely shifting to countryside within Mongolia itself. Today though the situation has changed of what was in the 1990s and there are now few Kazakhs who think of migrating to Kazakhstan, it is hard to predict as economic situation in Mongolia too is not conducive while that of Kazakhstan is becoming better. On 19 May 2003, a *Kazakhstan Today* news agency's report quoted the head of Mongolia's Bayan-Ölgii *aimag*, Badelkhan Kabdyslyam-uly as saying to the Kazakh President Nazarbaev that "a total of 30 per cent of the Kazakh diaspora live below the subsistence level in Mongolia and they are the ones who need to be moved [to Kazakhstan] first of all."⁴⁸ He was also reported to have urged Nazarbaev to help resolve a number of "acute" issues including increase of quota for Mongolian Kazakhs willing to migrate to Kazakhstan. According to the report, although there were 815 families ready to move by the end of 2003, the quota was set at only 51 families for Mongolia in that particular year.⁴⁹ However, since Kazakhstan's population itself now crossed over 15 million people which is hoped to be increased to 20 million by 2015 it seems unlikely that quota for *oralmans* from Mongolia could further be raised to the much higher level.

Current Status of Ethnic Kazakhs in Mongolia

From the socio-economic and political points of view, the status of ethnic Kazakhs as a minority within the State of Mongolia appears to be free from any systematic discrimination. Presently they enjoy equal rights with their Mongol peers within the country, as had been the case in the past. It is to be noted that during purges in the 1930s they suffered in the same way, as was the case with all ethnic groups in the country and most of the Muslim clergies disappeared as did the Buddhist lamas. However, there has never been any instance of ethnic inspired suppression of Kazakhs by the Mongolian

48. See, Justin Burke, "Almost One Ethnic Kazakh in Three Lives below Subsistence Level in Mongolia", 20 May 2003 at <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/mongolia/hypermail/200305/0000.shtml>

49. *Ibid.*

government. Considering their status as being the only one community having a limited cultural and political autonomy it seems that somehow they enjoy superior socio-economic and political privileges compared to other minority communities. In all Kazakh majority areas, the local administration has largely been dominated by ethnic Kazakhs. Kazakhs always have some representatives in the *State Great Khural* (Mongolian Parliament), apart from occupying senior ranks in various government institutions.

The Kazakhs are the only ethnic minority group in Mongolia who have medium of instruction in schools in their own language as can be witnessed in the whole of Bayan-Ölgii as well as in the *Khovd-sum*. It is to be noted that there were very few educated people among the ethnic Kazakhs when the Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* was established. These Kazakh people did not even speak Mongolian language very well. The Mongolian government at that time invited Kazakh speaking teachers and other administrative personnel from Soviet Kazakhstan.⁵⁰ They brought with them all the textbooks needed for imparting education from Soviet Kazakhstan itself. Though there were some Mongolian classes also in the Kazakh schools of Bayan-Ölgii, by and large almost all subjects were taught in Kazakh language. Although Kazakhs, like Mongolians, use the Cyrillic alphabet, their language is entirely different, i.e., they speak and write Turkic language by using 42 Cyrillic letters similar to Russian but largely different from Mongolian. Education in Kazakh language, therefore, has been a reflection of its Russian roots.⁵¹ However, since 1990s the Mongolian Kazakhs have also started using Arabic letters.

The Mongolian Kazakhs are known to have well preserved their native language, culture, tradition, customs and rites. It has been revealed that while maintaining their linguistic and cultural identity, the Mongolian Kazakhs have a far greater advantage over Kazakhs of the Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan. It is more so because the Mongolian Kazakhs have their own newspaper and periodicals in Kazakh language as

50 . Baatar, *op.cit*, p.97.

51 . *Ibid*.

well as Kazakh radio and television broadcasts, theatre and music.⁵² The written forms of Kazakhstani Kazakh and Mongolian Kazakh are same largely due to the fact that most of the Kazakh language books and printed materials used by Mongolian Kazakhs are imported from Kazakhstan. However, it is significant to note that the spoken varieties of Kazakh in Mongolia and Kazakhstan have several characteristic differences, particularly the phonological differences.⁵³ Bilingual Kazakhs i.e. those who have expertise in both the Mongolian and Kazakh languages, join the Mongols in professional and bureaucratic life on an equal footing.

Like Mongolians, the Kazakhs are also very traditional which can be seen through the architectural style of the Bayan-Ölgii city that reflects a significant Central Asian influence. Instead of having a typical Mongolian market the city has a *bazaar* where many buildings are designed and built by Kazakh architects. Not only eagle hunting and herding but also felt making and the sewing of sophisticated wall hangings are all examples of the exciting Kazakh culture that is flourishing in Western Mongolia. Kazakhs of the Altai region have traditionally hunted from horseback with trained golden eagles and, therefore, pictures of eagle-bearing Kazakhs are common in Mongolian tourist literature. Though the practice of eagle hunting has existed for over 2,000 years as a Kazakh tradition, today it is widely practiced only among Mongolian Kazakhs. Since the Mongolian Kazakhs have kept their identity alive by preserving their tradition and customs, it also led to the evolution of their unique folk song culture. The culture of mourning or “lamenting” has long been a part of Kazakh spiritual culture, and reflects ancient and evolving beliefs in death, soul and the afterlife.⁵⁴ Basically, laments are sung by women, such as the widow, daughters and other relatives of the deceased.

52. Alan J.K. Sanders, *Mongolia: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Printer, 1987), p.46.

53. See Andrew Shimunek, “Brief Field Notes on Ulaanbaatar Kazakhs”, *Mongol Survey* (Bloomington), no. 17, Winter-Spring 2006, pp.21-22.

54. Ozila Musahan, “The Culture of Lamenting among Kazakhs in Mongolia” Abstract of Paper presented at International Workshop and Conference on “Music of the Turkic-Speaking World, Performance and the Master-Apprentice System of Oral Transmission” held at SOAS, University of London on 3-4 February, 2006 at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/departments/departmentsinfo.cfm?navid=811>

It is noteworthy that the tradition of lamenting has still been preserved among the Mongolian Kazakhs despite various socio-economic and political changes the country has witnessed over the years.

So far as religious life of Kazakhs is concerned, today it is evident that religion has a growing influence in the whole Mongolian society but there is little evidence of religious activity among the Mongolian Kazakhs, who are originally Sunni Muslims. There are still only few strong adherents to Islam among the Kazakhs and the number of people praying regularly in mosques is very small.⁵⁵ The process of building mosques in Mongolia started in early 1990s. The largest mosque in the Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* was financed by Saudi Arabia,⁵⁶ followed by the establishment of a few other mosques. However, at the same time it cannot be denied that resurgence of Islam elsewhere in Central Asia soon after its independence has had no impact on Mongolian Kazakhs. It is evident from the fact that since the beginning of democratisation in Mongolia there has been a worsening situation in ethnic relations due to increasing nationalism among Kazakhs and Mongols alike. Some Kazakhs then demanded autonomy or even independence for Bayan-Ölgii *aimag*,⁵⁷ which if at all happens in future once again, may not be conducive for harmonious relations between overall Kazakh minority and Mongol majority in the country.

Nevertheless, the re-migration of Kazakhs from Kazakhstan has again not been hindered by the Mongolian government, which always had an ambiguous attitude against the emigration of the Kazakhs who are esteemed as hard workers. What is significant to note here is that most of the Kazakhs do not hesitate in considering Mongolia as their native country, and, therefore, homesickness has often been cited as the main reason for their re-migration back to Mongolia.⁵⁸ But according to a survey conducted among the

55. Finke (1999), *op.cit*, p.136.

56. Shirin Akiner, ed., *Mongolia Today* (London & New York: Keegan Paul International, 1991), p.xxiv.

57. Henry G. Schwarz, "Mongolia in the Era of Ethnicity", *Mongolica* (Ulaanbaatar), vol.9, no.30, 1999, pp.662-663.

58. Finke, (1999), *op.cit*, p.138.

Mongolian Kazakhs both in Mongolia as well as Kazakhstan, a clear divergence in individual and community identity has been revealed between the two geographic camps. The preliminary findings of the research conclude the following:

Those remaining in Mongolia express high levels of territorialisation to both Mongolia as a whole and to smaller scales of place within Mongolia (i.e. the Kazakh *aimag* of Bayan-Ölgii, specific *summons*/counties or towns and cities), while those that have migrated to Kazakhstan express a commitment to remain in Kazakhstan but retain strong attachments to smaller scales of place in Mongolia.⁵⁹

It is also noticeable that Mongolian Kazakhs are mostly pastoral but agriculture is also practiced. Evidently, liberalisation of Mongolian economy and politics has also provided enough opportunities for the economic well being of the people of Western Mongolia. Yet, pastoralism still dominates the economy of the Kazakh majority region despite the fact that privatisation of several enterprises provide the Kazakhs a fair job opportunities to compete with the Mongolians on equal footing. But outside the Western region growing industrialization has had tremendous impact on the Kazakhs. As already mentioned elsewhere, in search of opportunities in coal industries in Central Mongolia, several Kazakhs moved away from Bayan-Ölgii to the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar and nearby coal mines, particularly Nalaikh district apart from other industrialized cities. This population movement has been considered as a migration for the socio-economic prosperity of the Kazakh community in a country where economic growth is the primary concern today for the overall development, both internally as well as externally.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Mongolia cannot remain isolated from the influence of its two immediate neighbours, at least in the area of ethnicity its policy appears to be quite different. As noted by Henry Schwarz, Mongolia opted for neither the federalism of Russia nor the multiculturalism of China, rather a unitary state system,⁶⁰ which has clearly been accentuated in Article 2 of the existing constitution adopted on January 13,

59. See, Alexander C. Diener, "One Homeland or Two?: Territorialisation of Identity and the Repatriation Decision among the Mongolian-Kazakh Diaspora", at <http://www.irex.org/programs/iaro/research/01Diener.pdf>

60. See Schwarz, *op.cit.*, p.662.

1992: “Mongolia is a unitary state...[and] shall be divided into administrative units only.”⁶¹ Such description also points to an “oblique reference” to Buddhist Mongolia’s only one sizeable ethnic minority, the Muslim Kazakhs who have no place for separatism, if at all it has potential to emerge in future. The aforementioned discussions, however, reveal that there has been peaceful co-existence between the Mongols and the Kazakhs for a long time within Mongolia. Yet, there are indications that the Mongols now appear to be not disinclined to Kazakh migration as they think to be relieved of any potential inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions between Muslim Kazakhs and Buddhist Mongols.

The uncertainty in socio-economic condition and to some extent political situation of the country, if not tackled, may also contribute to worsen the ethnic relations between the two communities. Besides, considering the fact that the Kazakh community in Mongolia can easily be accessed through their rather tight and intimate social networks, dominant Muslim Kazakh factor particularly in Bayan-Ölgii *aimag* would remain intact as ever, which would not allow the Buddhist Mongols to outnumber Kazakhs at least in this western part of the country. But, in any case, a further emigration to Kazakhstan can not be ruled out which will certainly depend on the state of future economic condition of both the countries, and Kazakhs of Mongolia will not let lose the opportunity to keep their options open as long as possible.⁶²

So far as relations between Mongolia and Kazakhstan are concerned, economic and trade ties between the two sides are showing a sharp increase in recent time. As per estimates given by Kazinvest, in 2006 the total volume of trade between the two countries totalled at \$67.4 million, including \$66.3 million worth of export and \$1 million worth of import, thus increasing the trade turnover 1.2 times over 2005.⁶³ For the first quarter of 2007 the trade figure has reached \$7.76 million, including export to Kazakhstan at \$352.6 thousand and import at \$7.41 million, thus increasing the trade

61. See, *The Constitution of Mongolia* (Taipei: Mongolia and Tibetan Foundation, 1992), pp.1-31.

62. Finke, *op.cit*, pp.138-139.

63. See “President of Mongolia to visit Kazakhstan in August”, Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Austria at <http://www.kazakhstan.at/english/home/welcome/26072007-president-of-mongolia-to-visit-kazakhstan-in-august.html>

turnover by 3.6 times over the same period of 2006.⁶⁴ However, on the diplomatic front, issues pertaining to Mongolian Kazakh diaspora appears to remain a key factor in facilitating both the ongoing and future development of friendly ties between the two countries. It is evident from the fact that just a few years back one of the reports of the Kazakh Foreign Affairs Ministry acknowledged migration issue of Mongolia's ethnic Kazakhs as continuing to be the "key problem" in Mongolia-Kazakhstan relations.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the single largest factor that may hold both the Mongols and Kazakhs together in the future also remains to be their common nomadic identity.

64 . *Ibid.*

65. See, Justin Burke, "BBC 06/11/01: Mongolian Envoy Examines Kazakh-Mongolian Relations", at <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/mongolia/hypermail/200106/0003.html>
