

Mythologization of History and the Invention of Tradition in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This paper is dedicated to the issue of mythologized history and the invention of traditions in independent Kazakhstan. Every nation state encounters this phenomenon, but it is particularly relevant during the struggle for independent and the process of state building. In this article the author reviews different sources for this in Kazakhstan and reviews often-encountered topics, which are used by mythologizers. First of all, there is the effort to show that the Kazakhs are a very ancient people and tribes and people that were well-known in ancient history like the Sumerians, Sakas, Huns and other ethnic groups were in fact Kazakh tribes. They also often try to prove that Chingiz khan was a Kazakh. Most of those who create these myths are not professional historians, they are mobilizers of ethnicity, and usually they are physicists, mathematicians, and engineers. They invent traditions too. The mythologized history of Kazakhstan has various functions, one of them to delineate the territory of state. Another is to prove the special claims to authority of some Kazakh tribes. These myths are also used to counter the claims of other peoples to the territory of Kazakhstan.

Keywords

Mythologization – History – Invention of traditions – Kazakhs

Introduction

When characterizing the state-of-art of history writing in post-Soviet Kazakhstan one can outline such trends as the introduction of new documents into the analytical process and discussion of previously forbidden topics. For

example, the works of dissident researchers, pressurized by Soviet “official” history makers, finally received due recognition. The history science in Kazakhstan is currently on the rise, new historical magazines and research works being published, including those which were forbidden by the Soviet censorship. The professional historians of Kazakhstan, who suffered from the previous totalitarian regime, tend to stick to their old scholarly traditions and generally do not participate in the formation of mythologized history. However, it is possible to state that alongside the “pure” scholarly history its mythologized version has appeared widely in the history writing process of post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

This mythologization process is not unique to Kazakhstan. The blossoming of mythologized history in the post-independence period is observed in all post-communist countries, and it is mainly used to “mobilize an ethnicity” needed greatly at times of critical changes. In different countries the emergence of mythologized history is driven by the unique peculiarities of their ethnic and political processes. Mythologized history serves functions and tasks which are quite different from those of academic history writing.

The majority of researchers define the mythologization of history as the formation of a non-scientific version of the past, based usually on mythological concepts like the notion of a “Golden Age”; *kulturtreger* (culture bearer) and missionary roles of ancestors; cruel enemies, usurping the great achievements and habitat territory, which used to expand; and a return to the ‘good old days’.¹

A mythologized vision of history is often produced by representatives of the natural sciences, who are confident that the existing history of Kazakhstan has been written under censorship, per official order, and therefore requires urgent reconsideration. This is reflected in the names of their books. For instance, one of them is entitled “Alternative History of Kazakhstan”. Furthermore, in a republic of more than 100 ethnic groups and various religious confessions, the development of mythologized history based on the image of an enemy may undermine the stability of confessional and ethnic relationships. It is necessary to bear in mind that the encouragement of mythologized history in neighboring countries, exploiting the origins of their own people and emphasizing past territorial conquests might become a serious threat for national security in region at large and Kazakhstan in particular.

Although this parallel history could be ignored, in reality it is more popular than its academic equivalent: ‘historical’ myths is taught at school and actively incorporated in the formation of the historical consciousness. For instance,

1 Chernyshevskii, I. “Russian nationalism: nesostoyavsheesya prishestviye”, *Otechestvennye zapiski* 3 <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2002/3/russkiy-natsionalizm-nesostoyavsheesya-prishestvie>.

in a textbook called *Stories on the history of Kazakh SSR*, the tribes inhabiting the current territory of Kazakhstan from the first til the third centuries CE are named Kazakh, despite the fact that there is no record on any Kazakh tribes in historical sources of that time.²

Mythological version of history is well aligned with the tribal structure of the Kazakh society. Recently, especially since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, a substantial number of books, brochures, and articles devoted to separate tribes and their genealogy have been published. The works of amateur historians are published alongside with the works of professional historians, who shed light on previously unknown episodes of the Turkic tribes' history by exploring medieval oriental (Middle Eastern) sources.³ The main goal of these amateur authors' "research" is making the origin of tribe, clan, or *zhuz* (tribal alliance, also spelled Jüz; there are three main *zhuz* in the Kazakh society) more ancient than they are in reality. Such pronounced attention to separate tribes was also noticed by foreign researchers.⁴

A lot of such 'discoveries' were made by the physicist E. S. Omarov, who suggested that the Kypchaks (a Kazakh tribe) are descendants of the ancient Scythians and the Sakas who actually were Indo-Iranian tribes inhabiting Central Asia, including the territory of present Kazakhstan.⁵ No less prestigious ancestors have been found for the Kazakh tribe Arg'yn, who pretend to be descendants of the ancient Huns, more precisely the Ethtalites.⁶ The same ideas are used in the work of the engineer-mechanic Sh. Kuanganov.⁷ In accordance with this idea, the names of 'Huns' and 'Scythians' are simply replaced by the label 'Kazakhs' in many cases.⁸ These writings identified the legendary ruler of the European Huns, Attila, with the Turkic mythological hero Edil,

2 Turlegulov, T. *Rassakazy po istorii Kazakhskoi SSR. Posobiye dlya IV klassa*. Alma-Ata, 1988.

3 Abdiramanuly, A. *Halyq danasy. Sary bi zhane Qongyrat rularynung shezhiresi*. Almaty, 1992; *Suan shezhire*, Almaty, 1993; *Shezhire, Shezhire. Kishi zhuzding keibir atalary*. Almaty, 1995.

4 Akiner, Sh. *The Formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation State*. London, 1995, p. 58.

5 Omarov, E. "Skif + Sak = Skyfsak = Kipchak (o proiskhozhdenii kipchakov)". *Vestnik universiteta 'Kainar'* 2 (1997), p. 36-38.

6 Omarov, E. "Eftality beliyе gunny (ili o velik omgosudarstve Argu)". *Vestnik universiteta 'Kainar'* 1 (1998), p. 14-15.

7 Kuanganov, Sh. *Ariy-gun skvoz' veka i prostranstvo: svidetel'stva, toponimy*. Astana, 2001; Massanov, N. "Kazakhskaya politicheskaya i intellektual'naya elita: klanovaya prinadlezhnost' i vnuri etnicheskoye sopernichestvo". *Vestnik Evraziï* 2 (1996), p. 54-63.

8 Adjiev, M. *My izrodapolovetskogo! Izrodo slovnokumykov, karachaevtsev, kazakov, balkartsev, gagaurov, krymskikh tatar, a takzhe hasto russkikh i ukrain'tsev*. Rybinsk, 1992.

after whom the River Volga was named.⁹ This notion has become an axiom in “alternative history”.

Moreover, efforts are made to prove the Kazakh origin of another great Mongol conqueror: Genghis Khan. The political grounds for this idea are highlighted in the foreword to the book by K. Daniyarov, a candidate of technical sciences:

Since the association of Genghis Khan with any ethnicity, including the Chinese, has an important geopolitical implication and may guide the political direction of that country in the future, the goal of this book is to attempt to reveal a truth about the Kazakh state and Genghis Khan's origin based on scientific research.

Then he continues:

Esukei Khan, the father of Genghis Khan, descended from the Kazakh tribe of the Kiyat, while his mother, Oyan, was from the Kazakh tribe of the Merkit, and finally his wife, Borte, descended from the Kazakh tribe of the Qongyrat. Moreover, given that in 1223 Genghis Khan divided his state among his four sons born by Borte, any further attribution of Genghis Khan's origin to the Mongols is groundless.¹⁰

The history of the Kypchaks, a tribal confederation and ancestors of the Kazakhs and some other Turkic peoples, is also presented from the perspective of their descentance from Genghis Khan: “the Kazakh historians tended to segregate themselves from Genghis Khan and his conquests and invented the Kypchak (Kypshak) origin of the Kazakh people”. Making the Kazakh history of the pre-Saka period ancient serves the same purpose of dissociation from the Mongols, although there is no need for that in the mythologized vision: “The ancient Chinese and the Mongols at present call the Kazakhs *Hassag* meaning “real Saka”, *ha* meaning “real” and *sag* the Sakas”.¹¹ Finding the ancient roots of a tribe is likely to result in a strengthening of the tribe's position and of its representatives in present state structures in Kazakhstan. Consequently, the celebration of anniversaries of honorable historical figures and various historical

9 Omarov, E. “Atilla i imperiya evropeiskih gunnov, *Vestnikuniversiteta 'Kainar'*, 1997. 3, p. 8-9; Omarov E., Kazakhstan—naslednik imperii gunnov”. *Vestnikuniversiteta 'Kainar'* 3 (1997), p. 32-36.

10 Daniyarov, K. *Alternativnaya istoriya Kazakhstana*. Almaty, 1998, p. 27.

11 Daniyarov. *Alternativnaya istoriya*. 13.

dates and events became very common in Kazakhstan. Each of these holidays serves to demonstrate the contribution of a certain tribe to the national history and culture of the Kazakh people, in the expectation of gaining better access to power or attaining a favorable position in some sphere for representatives of the tribe in question.

Numerous monuments established across the country aim to satisfy the ambitions of the leaders of the Kazakh tribes. Nowadays each city, "each town tends to find its own hero on a horse. These heroes stemming from folklore and legends are proclaimed as ancestors to numerous contemporary leaders and are counted by the dozens".¹²

The same idea lies at the core of large-scale events and holidays organized to praise relatively famous representatives of the past. The commemoration of their anniversaries can be seen as a variation on the joint ritual meal, which researchers consider a necessary tool for establishing social relations.¹³

Antiquating becomes one of the peculiar characteristics of mythologized history. A large scale migration of Kazakhs from China and Mongolia to Kazakhstan after its independence brought a new perspective to the history of the Kazakhs. Representatives of Kazakh "repatriants" strongly believe that history of the Kazakhs is more ancient than official history has it.¹⁴ A number of efforts have been made by them to prove that the Kazakhs are direct descendants of the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia.¹⁵

One of the most extreme versions of making Kazakh history more ancient was undertaken by A. Baibatsha, a doctor of geological-mineralogical sciences.¹⁶ He writes that ancient Man appeared on earth during the same geological time in three independent areas, one of which is the Kazakh steppes. Baibatsha gives those people a genus name *kazakhanthrop*s, and claims that 2500 years ago an original Kazakh ethnicity was crystallized out from that ancient people.¹⁷ Another ridiculous example is the preparations to celebrate the anniversary of the city of Turkestan in Southern Kazakhstan in the year 2000, when it was discussed whether the city was 2000 or 1500 years old.

12 Ibrayeva, V. "V ozhidanii Godo: Sredne aziatskaya versiya poiskaidentichnosti". *Knigolyub* 56-57 (2005).

13 Arutyunov, S. *Vvedeniye, Etnografiya pitaniya narodov zarubezhnih stran Azii*. Moscow, 1981, p. 3-15.

14 Kinayat, Z. "Chingiskhan byl mongolom". *Megapolis* 18 October 2007.

15 Bahti, A. *Shumeri—Skify—Kazakhi: drevnyaya istoriya proushohzhdeniya tyurkov*. Almaty, 2002.

16 Baibatsha, A. *Antropogennaya istoriya Kazakhstana*. Almaty, 2003.

17 Massanov, N.; Abylkhozhyn, Zh.; Erofeeva, I., *Nauchnoe znaniye i mifotvorchestvo v sovremennoi storiografii Kazakhstana*. Almaty, 2007, p. 40, 180.

Undoubtedly, all above mentioned examples are primordialist approaches to the concept of the nation. At the same time we observe the tendency to blindly apply constructivist theory to Kazakh society. Some scholars try to prove that the modern Kazakh and Kyrgyz nations comprised a single ethnic unit before the Soviets artificially constructed them as separate nations. R. Zhanguzhin suggests that the Kazakh scientist of the 19th century, Chokan Valikhanov, being from *tore* (i.e. a descendant of Genghis Khan), distanced himself from the Kazakhs, since the '*tore*' considered themselves a separate ethnic group.¹⁸ The author also suggests that Valikhanov always talked about Kazakhs in the third person. However, the opposite is observed in the actual works of Valikhanov. For instance, in the article "On Muslim religion in the steppe", he speaks of "*nashanarodnost*" ("our nationality").¹⁹ In his "Notes on judicial reform" Valikhanov expresses proudness of his people: "Among the non-Russian tribes incorporated into the Russian Empire, the first place for number, wealth and development opportunities is attributed to us, the Kazakhs".²⁰

The period of the Russian annexation of the Kazakh steppes comprises another especially popular theme of mythologization. Emphasis on this theme is connected with the formation of Kazakhstan as a modern independent state. Therefore we can observe a clearly skewed evaluation of the annexation and of the imperial period, when the Kazakh steppes were within the Russian Empire; such Kazakh distortion is then protested against by Russian historians.²¹

The lifestyle of the Kazakhs has also become a subject of mythologization. One of such myths is that the Kazakhs and their ancestors were not in fact nomadic people, but had a more developed agricultural lifestyle. Some authors are absolutely confident in proving this mythology. These researchers seem unaware that by such proclamations they undermine the role of nomadic civilization in the world historic process.²²

18 Zhanguzhin, R. "Etnopolitika sovremennogo Kazakhstana i sostavlya yushiyeyeyo etnoistoricheskoye i politicheskoye mify (*fragment novoiknigi*)" http://iicas.org/articles_15_08_02_ks.htm (consulted 15 August 2002).

19 Valikhanov, Ch. "O musulmanstve v stepi". In: *Sobraniye sochinenii*. Alma-Ata, 1985, vol. 4, p. 71-76.

20 Valikhanov, Ch. "Zapiski o sudebnoy reforme". In: *Sobraniye sochinenii*. Alma-Ata, 1985, vol. 5, p. 77-104.

21 Trepavlov, V. "Byl li Kazakhstan rossiiskoi i sovetskoi koloniyey?". *Rossiyskiye vesti* 31 May (2001).

22 Massanov, Abylkhozhyn, Erofeeva. *Nauchnoye znaniye i mifotvorchestvo*. 40, 108.

Mythologized history is usually based on fake sources.²³ The discovery of a number of such fake “historical works” has been announced in the initial stages of the independent Kazakhstan. During those times formation of the ideology of the new nation state was still in flux and Kazakhstan’s mass media emphasized the historical episodes connected with the liberation struggle of the Kazakh people against foreign aggressors and Tsarist colonizers.²⁴

Apparently there were not enough historians working on Turkestan city who are engaged in mythologization, so publishing houses made up the deficit by borrowing from similar writing on other Turkic regions.²⁵ At the same time, some ‘advanced’ schools of mythologizers took the stage in Kazakhstan. For instance, M. N. Abishev reconsiders the history of Kazakhstan from a perspective of the “new chronology” developed by Russian mathematicians.²⁶

The formation of the nation-state in Kazakhstan is substantially connected with the constructivist “invention of tradition”, also with regard to national symbols. Undoubtedly the development of state symbols and ideals forms an indispensable stage of

formation, fixation and identification of the nation and state as a single social cultural and political community. Every people develop and honor their national state symbols. They are based on a lasting tradition, in which of great importance are flags, emblems and other symbols and attributes of the state and national identification.²⁷

In particular the blue color of the state flag of Kazakhstan to certain extent reflects ancient Turkic genealogical legends substantiating the celestial origins

23 Kadyrbekuly B. (ed.), *Tausaruly Kazybibek. Tup-tukiannano zimesheyin*. Almaty. 1993; Kazybek-bek, *Kazybekbek Tausaruly—istoricheskaya lichnost', ucheniy i poet*. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. Almaty, 2001; Kozhabergenzhyrau, Elim-ai (datsan-nanuzindi). “N. Ebutalievting ‘SegizSoz’ kitabyan”. In: *Ushpaighambar*. Almaty, 1992, p. 155-183.

24 Massanov, Abylkhozyn, Erofeeva. *Nauchnoye znaniye i mifotvorchestvo*. 168.

25 Miziev, I. “Drevneyshiyeetno kulturniye plasty istorii tyurk skihnarodov”. *Alem* 1 (1990), p. 134-154; Karimullin, A. *Tyurki i indeitsy Ameriki—istoki proiskhozhdeniya*. Almaty, 2004.

26 Abishev, M. *Epokha Zolotoi Ord'y i stanovleniye sotsialno-kulturnykh system (noviyvzglyadna istoriyu)*. Almaty, 2007. The New Chronology is a theory commonly considered as pseudo history by academics. It holds that conventional chronology of Middle Eastern and European history is wrong, claiming that events attributed to Antiquity actually happened much later, during the Middle Ages. The New Chronology is most often associated with the Russian mathematician A. Fomenko.

27 Gadzhiev, S. *Politologiya*. Moskva, 1994, p. 341-342.

of the Turks.²⁸ Similarly the symbol of the *shangyrak* (the top part of the yurt, the traditional felt house of the Kazakhs) is depicted in the center of the state emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Beside that the *shangyrak* symbolizes stability and well-being. It is necessary to note that the state symbols of the Republic of Kazakhstan, particularly the emblem, compositionally resembles the former emblem of Soviet Kazakhstan, representing continuity between the independent state and its predecessor. At the same time all elements of the Soviet symbolics of the emblem of Kazakhstan have been replaced with ancient elements. Winged horses from the Saka time *kurgan* (burial mound) replaced grain ears of the emblem of the Kazakh SSR (see Illustrations 1 and 2). The archeologist E. E. Kuzmina and the linguist V. A. Livshic argue that *shangyrak* itself derives from the name of an Indo-Iranian dwelling, *Čangaraka*, which means “(celestial) circle”.²⁹

Al-Fārābī, the “Second Teacher” after Aristotle, became another symbol of modern Kazakhstan; National bank notes contain a depiction of him, and numerous streets and universities are named after him. Kazakhstan has even constructed a mausoleum for al-Fārābī on his tomb in Damascus.³⁰ However the Kazakhs are not the only people who lay claim to the legacy of the great scientist al-Fārābī. The president of Tajikistan, E. Rakhmonov, addressing the Russian media rejects “the Kazakhs’ and Kazakhstan’s ownership of al-Fārābī as their great compatriot”, based on the fact that although al-Fārābī was born on the territory of modern Southern Kazakhstan, he was Tajik by origin.³¹ Needless to say at the time of al-Fārābī none of contemporary nations existed. According to the scholar V. V. Bartold, al-Fārābī was a Turk by origin, but he received his education in Baghdad and was buried in Damascus.³²

Kazakhstan, just as other Central Asian states, experiences a revival of certain state traditions and institutions, which are considered by researchers aspects of the mythologization of history. The most well-known are: The court of the *bij*. This institute existed in the steppe and was based on the norms of customary law, the so-called *Zheti Zharghy* (Seven codes), which played an important role in the life of the Kazakh khanate. Its role was underappreciated by the Russian Tsarist administration and, unlike the power of the Khan, the

28 Zuev, Yu. Drevne tyurkskiye genealogicheskiye predaniya kakistochnik porannei istorii tyurkov (*diss. kand. istor. nauk*). Almaty, 1967, p. 14.

29 Akishev, A. “Put’ k zemleg iperboreev”. *Iran-name* (2007), p. 21-40.

30 Alekseyeva, D. “Domoiskvoz’ veka”. *Argumenty i fakty Kazakhstan* 12 (2006).

31 Sattarov, R. “Tengekak zhertva tadjiksko-kazakhskihs poroviz-zanaslediya al-Farabi” www.zona.kz consulted on 29 November 2006.

32 Barthold, V. “Kul’tura musulmanstva”. In: *Sochineniya*. Moscow, 1966, vol. 4, p. 46.



ILLUSTRATION 1
The emblem of Soviet Kazakhstan.



ILLUSTRATION 2
The emblem of independent Kazakhstan.

institute of the *biys* was eliminated. At present it is revived and once again exists in some provinces of the Kazakhstan. The *Khan's* power. In the Kazakh Khanate (1456-1847) all power was concentrated in the hands of supreme rule holding a title of *khan*. The khan was a symbol of the center of the Society and cosmos; he guaranteed stability in the state and nature. The Kazakh khans formed one of the branches of the dynasty of Genghis Khan. For a long time in the lands conquered by Mongols (including Russia) the principle of *Chingisizm* predominated.³³ In post-Mongolian steppe states there existed a tradition, according to which the khan was elected from Genghis Khan's descendants

33 Yudin, V. *Ordı: Belaya, Sinyaya, Seraya, Zolotaya ... , Kazakhstan, Srednyay Aziya v XVI-XVIII vv.* Alma-Ata, 1983, p. 106-164.

(*Chenghizids*). In other words, only descendants of the “Golden (Genghis Khan) clan” could be legal rulers from this point of view. In the 1820s, after the Kazakh steppes had been annexed by Russia, the khan’s power was annulled. In the course of the national liberation uprisings there was an attempt to restore it. The idea of its restoration was even articulated recently. Referring to the old tradition the person in question probably thought that the monarch should not necessarily be a *Chenghizid*. In reality the *Chinghizids* were never included in the Kazakh *zhuz* system in the way some other groups of Kazakhs (Hodzhas, Tulenguts, Sunaks, etc.) were. The Russian administration abolished the powers of the *khan* power and eventually the institute of khans in the Kazakh steppe itself in the 19th century. But before this the Kazakh khans were reduced to the level of the Tsar’s bureaucrats. Now, Kazakhstan is the only country in the world which claims to have direct descendants of Genghis Khan. The revival of this institution is connected with the Kazakh *zhuzes* and the issue of tribalism. The unofficial leaders of the *zhuzes* are pretenders to the khan’s throne. Many of the pretenders are not *Chinghizids*. The elections of the khans took place in some districts of Kazakhstan, and they were carried out in accordance with ancient tradition. The last elections took place during the First World War, when the Kazakhs revolted against the Tsar’s administration. In 1916 nine khans were elected in the Turgai district alone. The revival of this institution may see an end to democracy in the Republic, if the illegal khans were to take power. Moreover, this institution, and an election of three khans for the three traditional *zhuzes* could divide the territory of Kazakhstan.

Nawrūz (lit. new day; New Year holiday) has been announced in Kazakhstan as a national holiday. With national awakening in Central Asian republic by the end of the Soviet time, *Nawrūz* in Kazakhstan became considered more and more as an element of the Kazakh, and even of the Islamic traditional culture. With Kazakhstan’s independence it became a Kazakhstan national holyday, which was to strengthen inter-ethnic concord in the country with latent ethnic, social and economic tensions. Andrea Shmitz considers *Nawrūz* an “invented tradition”, as the essence and meaning of the holiday were modified since late 1980s. Similarly to other central Asian states, *Nawrūz* in Kazakhstan is used for the unification of the country’s population and its symbolism was enriched with Kazakh traditional culture. Nowadays, *Nawrūz* is perceived as part of the national legacy of the Kazakhs, who, for the most part, are Muslims.

As mentioned above, traditional institutes are being revived and in many instances created:

Council of Aksakals (Elder people). *Aksakals'* councils have been revived in practically all regions of Kazakhstan. As a rule, these councils exist as unofficial municipality (*akimat*; district or city administrations) departments. The role which is played by the Council of Elders in Kazakhstan is in contrast with that in Turkmenistan where the corresponding organization is *de jure* a fourth branch of government. In Chechnya (North Caucasus) the leaders of *taips* (tribes) are included in the government. All Councils of Elders in Kazakhstan include representatives from all of Kazakhstan's ethnic groups. The Council of Elders carries out the function of a consultant for the state administration. They have a certain degree of authority and they mediated in interethnic conflicts in Novyi Uzen and Issyk. Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. The official documents of Kazakhstan (the Constitution etc.) declared the existence of "the people of Kazakhstan", which is made up of various ethnicities (groups) of Kazakhstan. In order to achieve this aim, national culture centres have been set up. The non-governmental Assembly of people of Kazakhstan was founded in 1995. The Assembly includes the directors of the ethno-national culture centers of Kazakhstan. The nature of this institution is similar to that of a Council of Elders in ancient times, but the main function of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is to guarantee peace and stability in interethnic relations. Though the Assembly is a nongovernmental organization, the President of Kazakhstan uses it as a Parliament. For example, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan proposed recommendations about prolonging the President's power and about accepting the New Constitution.

Traditional Society of the Kazakhs. Kazakh society consists of tribes. Each tribe uses a genealogy with real or legendary ancestors. As a rule, the tribes were divided to *auls* (nomad villages), and the inhabitants of the *auls* were related to each other. Each *aul* had a leader, a *bay* (rich and authoritative man). The Soviet Government destroyed the traditional society of the Kazakhs, and the *bays* were repressed. In all of the former Soviet Republics there is a phenomenon newly affluent for calling people "new Russians", "new Moldovans", etc. The "new Kazakhs" revived traditional social relations in the villages. They execute the functions of *bays*, giving jobs and salaries to relatives.³⁴

34 Karimov, N. "Turtsiya—EU: Kazakhstan i problem bezopasnosti v Tsentral'noi Azii". In: *Vzaimodeistviye Turtsii i Tsentralnoi Azii v kontekst sterasshira yusheysya Evropy*. Almaty, 2006, p. 402-419.

Zhuzes (*hordes*). For Kazakhstan the concept of *zhuz* (lit.: 'hundred') became a problem of tribalism. Kazakh society consists of three regionally organized *zhuz*. This system is expressed in social and political life of the society in a way that position of each *zhuz* in certain sphere is fixed and gives the holders leverage of power. The revival and development of tribalism is also promoted by complex economic conditions, which accompany the formation of any state. These affect the rural population, which are mostly Kazakhs, the most. Young people from the countryside migrate to the cities, where they are faced with the problem that they don't have a good enough Russian language skills, that they lack knowledge and other skills—on top of the every-day-life difficulties they encounter. Being in an unknown place the young people stick together in community and clan based groups, and this allows them to gain certain support from others. Sociologists point out that marginal groups of populations are very traditional.³⁵

The origin of the *zhuzes* is a difficult problem for historians. Here are some of the opinions on this problem: Iu. A. Zuev considers that *zhuzes* are connected with a hunting-army system: "left flank—center—right flank".³⁶ The majority of Kazakhstan historians think that the origin of *zhuzes* was connected with geographical factors. They think that the territory of Kazakhstan is divided into three geographical zones, and this circumstance caused the origin of three *zhuzes*.³⁷ The so-called "Functional theory" is connected with J. Dumezil's theory of the Indo-European "three functional needs of society"—i.e. regulatory, operative (production) and distributive. Now some scholars use "functional theory" to explain the internal political processes in Kazakhstan. But they feel that the functions of the *zhuzes* are not an ideal image of society, they simply reflect Kazakh reality.

Indeed, we see that in modern Kazakhstan the ideal model coincides with reality: the Senior *Zhuz* rules in the country and the Middle *Zhuz* is the intellectual elite.³⁸ This point of view equates the Kazakh *zhuzes* to the Indo-European model of society, for example, a society like that which existed in

35 Osipova, O. *Amerikanskaya sotsiologiya o traditsiyakh v stranakh Vostoka*. Moscow, 1985, p. 39-40.

36 Shmits, A. *Izobreteniyе traditsii i sozdaniyеnatsiy v Kazakhstane, Vzaimodeystviye i vzaimovliyaniye narodov Vostochnogo Kazakhstana v hozhaystvennoy i kulturnoy deyatel'nosti XVIII-XXI vv.* Ust-Kamenogorsk, 2002, p. 135-140.

37 Eitsen H. "Nawriz in Kazakstan: Scenarios for Managing Diversity". In: *Contemporary Kazaks: Cultural and Social Perspectives*. Ingvar Svanberg (ed.). London and New York, 1999, p. 73-102.

38 Nurmagambetova, R. *Dvizheniye Alash i Alash-Orda: istoriographicheskiye problemi. 1920-1990 gg.* Almaty, 2003, p. 93.

India. In reality the division into *zhuzes* with different functions was established comparatively recently in the periods of the Russian Empire and the USSR. In the period when the Kazakh steppes were included in the Russian Empire, the Kazakhs of Middle *Zhuz* had more contacts with the European peoples. They studied in the Russian-Kazakh schools and after finishing them they worked as translators, managers, etc. As a consequence, the Kazakhs of the Middle *zhuz* supplied the intellectual elite (members of which included I. Altynsarin, Abai Kunanbaev, and M. Auezov and the leaders of the 'Alash' movement, etc.).

The Soviet government adopted the policy of diminishing intertribal connections. There was collectivization, sedentarization, and migration of peoples in Soviet Kazakhstan. In 1960-1965 the territory of Kazakhstan was divided into three areas. The borders of these new districts coincided with the borders of the traditional *zhuz* territories. The hegemony of Middle *Zhuz* was interrupted in the 1960s. It happened because L. I. Brezhnev became a CPSU General Secretary, and he appointed his friend D. A. Kunaev to be a head of the republic. Kunaev belonged to the Senior *Zhuz*. The position of the Middle *Zhuz* was further weakened because his brother was appointed President of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR.

As the Indo-European functions of the *zhuzes* were coupled with Turkic-Mongol tribal organizations, the problem of *zhuzes* for Kazakhstan becomes the problem of tribalism. It is shown in the strengthening of *zhuzes*' positions in various spheres of activity and by their attaining power. Nowadays clans of the Middle *Zhuz* are attempting to reestablish their position. K. Sagadiev, a representative of this *zhuz*, was elected President of the National Academy of Science. But the government of the republic reduced the significance of the Academy, which was incorporated in the Ministry for Science and New Technology. A neutral person, V. Shkolnik, was then appointed President of this organization.

Kazakhstan's economic difficulties also play a role in the revival and the growth of tribalism. These difficulties affect the Kazakh population more seriously than other parts of citizens as 65% of the Kazakhs live in the country side. Admittedly, the rural inhabitants tend to stick to customs and traditions to begin with.³⁹ Representatives of the Senior *Zhuz* also cling to the tradition of tribalism more than those from the Middle or Junior *Zhuzes*, because the South, the domain of the Senior *Zhuz*, is traditionally an agrarian part of the country. When the Kazakh youth migrates from the *aul* (villages) to

39 Mustafayev, N. "Pyat' mifovob intelligentsii". 29 December 2005 <http://zonakz.net:8080/articles/10514?mode=reply>.

cities they encounter an environment of hostility, because the Kazakhstan cities are made up of non-Kazakh populations (with the exception of cities in the South). The Kazakh youth consequently searches for support and a revival of tribal relations. Tribalism in the political life of Kazakhstan has the following manifestations: a) Tribal relations have a negative influence on the society and political life of state. As these factors have a strong influence in politics it may result in unforeseen consequences; b) Tribal and *zhuz* interests are reflected in the government's political course, and this lowers the state's effectiveness to govern; c) The strengthening of some *zhuz* positions may result in a split of the national elite; d) Tribalism strengthens the influence of the regional lobby on governmental policy; e) The administration system functions in agreement with the interests of the *zhuzes*; f) Tribalism influences personnel policy.⁴⁰

Kazakhstan may well end up being divided into three parts as a result of tribalism. The frequent celebration of ancient and modern heroes' anniversaries contributes to making this a self-fulfilling prophecy. These anniversaries aim at strengthening all-Kazakh self-consciousness, but in reality they strengthen the ambition of the informal leaders of the three *zhuzes*. When, in 1995, Kazakhstan celebrated an anniversary of the famous Kazakh writer Abai and after that, in 1996, the anniversary of another poet, Zhambul Zhabaev, a lot of people perceived it as an unofficial competition between the Middle and Senior *zhuzes* respectively. The year 1997 was announced as the year of another great Kazakh writer, Mukhtar Auezov. His son and initiator of the anniversary, Murat Auezov, understood anniversaries are a variation on the traditional ritual feast with the aim of forging social connections; for this reason he refused to include elements of competition, such as *asbaiga* (horseback competition for a ship), the building of monuments, etc. in his father's anniversary.⁴¹

Besides this, there are phenomenon based on ancient traditions such as the elections of khans at the *Qurultai* (tribal congress) and the formation of the army on a tribal basis (now in Kazakhstan this is possible thanks to the freedom to buy different weapons). In the army there used to exist the traditional institution of *dedovshina* (seniority, i.e. the domination of old soldiers [veterans?]) but it has acquired tribal features now. Some political scientists consider that the transfer of capital aims at directing the stream of migrants from the villages of South Kazakhstan, where there are a lot of unemployed people, to the northern regions. This policy will result in a) increasing the Kazakh

40 Bukeykhanov A. "Kirgizy". In: *Formy natsional'nogo dvizheniya v sovremennikh gosudarstvakh*. A.I. Kosteliansky (ed.). Saint Petersburg, 1910, p. 586-623.

41 Kurtov, A. "Politicheskaya elita Kazakhstana: uspekhi i porazheniia" 1994. <http://mail.ru/?ffsputnik=1&bm=1>.

population in the North,⁴² b) increasing the territory of Senior *Zhuz*, and c) diminishing of the influence and authority of the Middle *Zhuz* on its own lands. In 1996 a re-arrangement of staff in Government took place, and the press reacted by describing this as the President of Kazakhstan's return to a traditional eastern tribal structure for the formation of the ruling elite. Besides, some political scientists talk about the President's policy of *chemolganizatsiia* (Chemolgan is the name of a village in South Kazakhstan, the birthplace of the President N. A. Nazarbayev).

Kazakh tribalism in the modern multiethnic Kazakhstan is not only a Kazakh phenomenon. Representatives of many ethnicities have many kinds of relations with the Kazakh people (kinship, friendship, etc.)⁴³ and they are included in the Kazakh clans (in the period of Russian Empire there existed the institution of *tamyr*, "friendship-brotherhood"). During an uprising in Alma-Ata in 1986, this group (also called the "fourth *zhuz*") stood up for its own rights for the first time.

The Kazakh *zhuzes* had a long period of development,⁴⁴ and from the ideal model of society they have been transformed into a negative factor for independent Kazakhstan.

The institution of Cossacks. After the collapse of the USSR, the problem of the Cossacks has become very real. There were incidents between Kazakhs and Cossacks in Uralsk (1993) and in Almaty (1994).

The Cossacks are an unstable factor in Kazakhstan, but historically they are connected with the Kazakhs. Cossacks as well as Kazakhs are connected with traditional institution of Cossacking (*kazakovanie*). The Cossacks as an institution have existed in the Eurasian steppes for a long time already.

The Kazakh genealogical myth holds that the Kazakhs originated from three hundred *dzhigits* (warriors) who left their motherland and settled in the steppe. Such things were done in ancient times and were connected with the passage from one age group to another (rites of ordaining or initiation). During the passing of this rite, the youths were divided into groups

42 Zhanguzhin R. *Etnopolitika sovremennogo Kazakhstana* [http://iicas.org/articles_15_o8_02 ks.htm].

43 Frank A. "Islamic transformation on the Kazakh Steppe, 1742-1917. Towards on Islamic History of Kazakhstan under Russian Rule". In: *The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia, Proceedings of the July 2002 International Symposium at the SRC*. Sapporo, 2003, p. 261-289.

44 Olcott, M. "The Fabrication of a Social Past. The Kazakhs of Central Asia". In: *Political Anthropology Yearbook*. Vol. 1: *Ideology and Interest. The Dialectics of Politics*. London, 1980.

of hundreds—*zhuz*.⁴⁵ One element of initiation is leaving the community. Usually, in the Turkic steppes the people who go away are called Kazaks (lit. 'fugitive', 'tramp', 'free man', etc.). Later, this name was used for men who had different reasons for leaving their own group.

There was also a "society of Kazaks". One of them was a community consisting of AbulKhayr Khan's nomads. They revolted against Abulkhair-khan, and left him to seek happiness in another place with Ghirei and Dzhanibek (they were founders of Kazakh khanate) at the head, descendants of Urus Khan.⁴⁶ They were divided in three "units of one hundred" (*zhuzes*) and were named Kazak (Kazakh), in accordance with tradition.

Also, in the 15th century, the Ukrainian peasants abandoning Polish feudalists, borrowed from Turkic people the name "Kazak" (Cossacks). Later they were broken up, and changed from opposing the Tsars' regime to defending it. The government increased the army of Cossacks on the border of Empire for the annexation of new lands. For instance, on 10 April 1789, a whole people, the Bashkirs, were registered as Cossacks. Also, practically all Kalmyks were Cossacks. When the Russians annexed the lands in the East and South, the Ossetians, Buriats, Yakuts were added to the Cossacks. Russian Cossacks thus have different origins; The Ossetians are an East Iranian people, the Kalmyks and Buryats are Mongolian, and the Bashkirs are Turkic people. Based on ethnic factors, the Cossacks should therefore not be considered as one people or as a part of Russia. We have no reason to interpret the Cossacks as a pure Russian phenomenon, because at the same time there exists Ukrainian Cossacks, who were enemies of Russia.

The Cossacks are not homogenous in religion either: the Kalmyks are adherents of Buddhism, Buriats are lamaists (i.e. Tibetan Buddhists) and some of the Ossetians and Bashkirs are Muslims. They have different cultures too. For example, the Russian Cossacks of Bashkortostan wore military forms, but Bashkirs had a national dress.

One common feature of the different groups of Russian Cossacks is their military function. The Tsar's administration transformed the Russian Cossacks as an institution into a military-feudal estate. The traditional institution of the Cossacks disappeared. The Soviet government abolished the Cossacks as an estate after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Russian Federation's law "On rehabilitation of the repressed peoples" (26 April, 1991) was an impetus for the

45 Nurtazina, N. *Narody Turkestana: problem islama, integratsii, modernizatsii i dekolonizatsii (narubezhe XIX-XX vekov)*. Almaty, 2008.

46 Sultangalieva, A. *Islam v Kazakhstane: istoriya, etnichnostj, obshchestvo*. Almaty, 1998.

rebirth of the Cossacks. Later the Russian Government passed additional laws regarding the Cossacks. All these actions promoted the revival of the Cossack movement in Kazakhstan.

Before the Bolshevik Revolution, four Cossack armies (Siberian, Uralian, Orenburgian, Semirechian) existed in Kazakhstan. The Cossacks of Kazakhstan declare themselves either an independent people or as belonging to the Russians. Their main aim is to annul the independence of Kazakhstan, with the revival of a Cossack army, and to be incorporated into the Russian Federation. As we have argued above, none of these demands have any ground because the Cossacks are not a people but a military estate. This circumstance does not give them a right to claim national autonomy. Besides, a lot of the Cossacks of Kazakhstan are descendants of Kazakhs. The Russian law for Ruling the Siberian Kazakhs prescribed that Kazakhs who adopted the Orthodox Religion should be registered as Cossacks. In some Cossack *stanitsa* (villages) about half the population were Orthodox Kazakhs. Ch. Valikhanov, Sh. Nuralikhanov, A. Bukeikhanov and some famous Kazakhs were Cossack officers. The Cossacks of Kazakhstan borrowed many elements of the Kazakh culture. Ch. Valikhanov, N. M. Yadrintsev, P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, G. N. Potanin, P. A. Chikhachev wrote that a lot of Cossacks understood the Kazakh language better than Russian.

As the different Cossack units of Kazakhstan were included into Cossack territorial formations of Russia from the very beginning of their revival, they began to be subordinated to the law of another state, i.e. Russia. For example, in the Kostanai district, four Cossack villages (Kostanaiskaia, Zatobolskaia, Elizavetinskaia and Novopokrovskaia) were rebuilt and they formed Kostanai Yurt. This formation was included in the Troitsk section of the Orenburg Cossack army. The inhabitants of these villages are citizens of the Russian Federation. Currently the Cossacks of Semirech'e (Zhetisu) are divided into two parts. If one of them has a radical position, the other part tries to have a dialogue and achieve a compromise with the government. They signed a document about "peace" and worked out plan for the economic rebirth of the Cossacks. But at the same time, the Cossacks of Semirech'e have a problem with ethnic identification; on the one hand they call themselves not a people but a brotherhood. On the other hand, as a people they try to enter the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. But in Kazakhstan, in comparison with Russia, the Cossacks are considered not as an ethnic group, but as a military estate living by the laws of another state, so conflicts arose between the State and the Cossacks. First of all this is connected with the desire of the Cossacks to renew some important sides of this institute including military society and the defense of the borders. The transference of military functions to the Cossacks

who consider themselves citizens of Russia is not possible, however, because it would threaten the security and independence of Kazakhstan.

The Government of the Russian Federation is trying to form armed groups of Cossacks in the Southern regions of the country, and this attempt could provoke an increase of the Cossack movement in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In any case, each document of the Russian Government about the Cossack problem causes debate and trouble in Kazakhstan. Recently in Russia there was a military test of borders defences by the Cossacks. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan was troubled by the test and made its feelings clear to Russia.

Thus, the process of mythologization has evolved and continues to be relevant in Kazakhstan. This is predominantly explained by its living nomadic tradition of division into tribal groups, representatives of which now try to attain economic influence. Some who are focused on a particular group mythologize its history by introducing revised 'alternative' histories of their tribes and antiquating them. Competition among the tribes resulted in large scale celebrations of jubilees, although this tradition is no longer in use in modern Kazakhstan.

Unqualified "researchers" (usually representatives of technical sciences) who do not distinguish between the formation of ethnos and state have no qualms about claiming Genghis Khan as a Kazakh. The proliferation of "new chronology" is also observed in the country. As practiced across the region, the history of the Kazakh nation is dated back to the Sumerian state without any justification. Perhaps this trend appeared in response to Russian historians' criticism that nomadic culture was rather wild, and therefore unable to create statehood and culture.

The formation of statehood is connected with the resolution of many problems of the past. Among the most important tasks are the creation of rule-of-law and a civil transformation to democracy. Kazakhstan is building upon experiences elsewhere in the world to attain these goals. At the same time, many traditional institutions which have been invented and/or mythologized play important roles in various spheres of society and state. It could be argued that these institutions throw the country back or promote it. Perhaps further studies will shed further light on this issue in the future.

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