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The Kazakh Minority in Mongolia: Falconry as a Symbol of Kazakh Identity

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1. Introduction

The Kazakhs are a minority group in Mongolia and are Muslims. The Kazakhs in Mongolia mainly live in western Mongolia and engage in animal husbandry; the small remainder live in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. It has been almost 160 years since the Kazakhs resided in Mongolia. In the early nineteenth century, some Kereits¹⁾ came to settle on the northern slope of the Altai chain and moved along the tributary of the Khovd River, in the present territory of Bayan-Ölgii province, western Mongolia. Kereit Kazakhs from the territory of Mongolia are those who have lived firstly in what is now Kazakhstan. They also migrated to China in the territory of modern Xinjiang. The 1921 Revolution in Mongolia brought in the decision to establish a stable border agreement between China, Mongolia and Russia. However, the Kazakh nomads continued to move from one territory to another ignoring these boundaries until the creation of an area specially designated for their use in 1940.

Kazakhs inhabiting Mongolia have successfully kept their national culture and traditions in their original form. Among the traditions kept to the present are eagle falconry and its associated practices, their national holiday *Nauryz (Nawriz)*, and customs associated with daily life, birth, and death. During the recent development of the country's market economy, these traditions recovered and gained importance, and other ethnic groups in Mongolia also became curious about these cultural behaviors and practices. Therefore, interest in Kazakh traditions has increased to a significant point.

Falconry is the traditional activity of keeping and training eagles for hunting among the Kazakhs of Mongolia²⁾. Since the Kazakhs migrated to Mongolia, they have continued their traditional practice of hunting with eagles and have passed this knowledge to their descendants as one of their most important traditions. During the shift to a market economy, falconry was also one of their sources of livelihood, as well as being a bridge connecting them to other cultures. Falconry is still practiced today.

The form of falconry among Kazakhs is unique in that they use female golden eagles, hunt on horseback, and primarily hunt foxes. The eagle is called *bürkit* in Kazakh language. Mongolian Kazakh falconers, called *bürkitshí* or *burgedchin*, have developed a strong relationship and spiritual bond with their birds, and commitment is required to

breed, train, handle, and fly them. Falconry has been transmitted as a cultural tradition by a variety of means, including mentoring, learning within families, and formalized training by an official association. The practice of hunting with eagles on horseback has become an important symbol of the ethnic identity of the Mongolian Kazakhs, to which many traditions and customs are linked.

This paper will explore the ancient practice of *bürkitshí* among the Kazakhs and how this practice became a symbol of Kazakh identity in Mongolia. In 2007 and 2013, I went to Bayan-Ölgii Province to conduct interviews with the local population practicing falconry with eagles about how they have been able to keep this tradition alive. In this context, we asked the following questions:

- i) What government policies are in place to preserve the culture and traditions of the Kazakh minority in Mongolia?
- ii) Does the eagle symbolize the Kazakhs living in Mongolia? How does the majority of the population perceive this?
- iii) Will the eagle become a symbol of the Mongolian Kazakhs?
- iv) How does the eagle connect the Mongolian Kazakhs to other groups?

Based on the results of this interview as well as on a review of the Mongolian and Kazakh literature, we will discuss the tradition of *bürkitshí* among the Mongolian Kazakhs.

2. General Background of the Kazakhs in Mongolia

The Kazakhs are the largest national minority in Mongolia. During the 2000 Population and Housing Census, 102,983 individuals, or 4.35% of the total population, were Kazakh, and in the 2010 Census, 101,526 individuals, or 3.86% of the total population, were Kazakh. The majority of Kazakhs, 91%, reside in Bayan-Ölgii Province. Kazakhs also make up 10% of the population of Khovd Province as well as 30% of the capital city Ulaanbaatar's Nalaikh District (Fig. 1).

Bayan-Ölgii Province is located in northwest Mongolia, in the high western mountains of the Altai mountain range, at an altitude of 1200 to 4400 meters above sea level (Sultan & Zulkhafil 1990). Presently in Bayan-Ölgii, there are 13 *soums*, 84 *bags*, and 1 village of 30,000 people in the center of the province, which is located 1760 km from Ulaanbaatar³.

The earliest settlements of the Kazakhs in Mongolia are from the second half of the nineteenth century. First, a few families migrated there. Later on, they inhabited the area in bigger numbers. According to historical documents, Kazakhs migrated to the foothills of the Altai Mountains along the pasture, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, and started settling in tribes: "In 1860, Kazakhs went to the foothills of the Altai Mountains and were grazing livestock, this was in the current Bayan-Ölgii Province of the People's Republic of Mongolia" (Potanin 1881). In 1924, Dautbai, the first representative of the Kazakh minority in the Great *Khural* (in Mongolian, congress) of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR), said, "Sixty years passed after we Kazakhs settled in Mongolia" (Sanjdorj 1984). As a result of the 1864 "western border clearing"

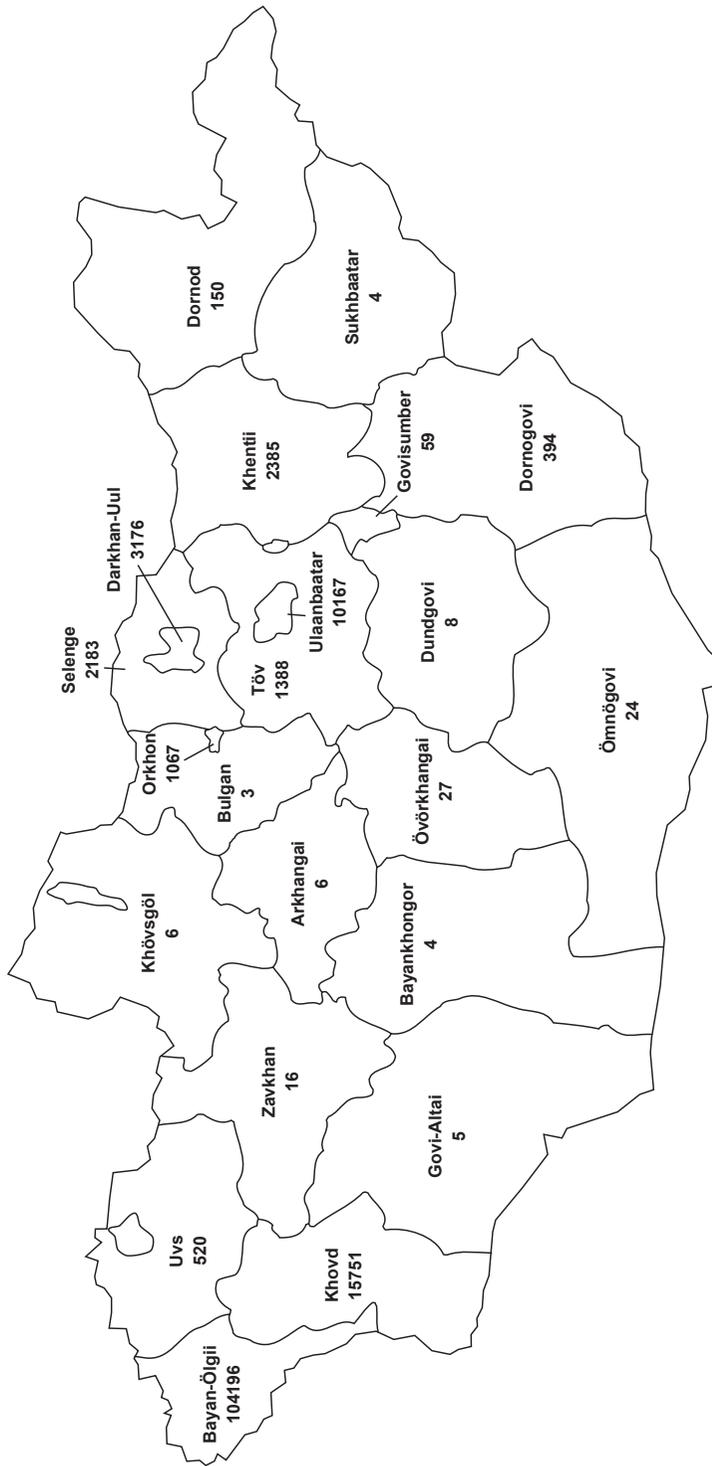


Figure 1 The Kazakh population in Mongolia (2008)
(Data were obtained from the archive "Civil Registration and Information Center, by 1st of October 2008")

negotiations held in St. Petersburg between Russia and China, the Kazakh homeland was divided between the two powers and the Kazakh people became subjects of Russia and China, known as “Russian Kazakhs” and “Chinese Kazakhs,” respectively. Before this appropriation, the Kazakhs had been living in a vast territory in the Middle East for centuries. Thus, Kazakhs who lived near the Altai, Tarvagatai, and Tien-Shan mountains remained in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which was under the jurisdiction of Manchu (Qing Dynasty). Nomadic herding people roam seeking better pasture land and abundant water, so some of the Khereit began spending winters and summers moving toward the back of the Altai range in Khovd starting in the mid-nineteenth century. The newcomers in Khovd lived without oppression and their herds multiplied, and soon the number of people increased. The Kazakhs who lived on the south side of the Altai range learned about this and they also migrated, and their numbers increased as well; therefore, since the 1860s, there was a new perception of the “Mongolian Kazakhs” (Sultan & Zulkhafil 1990).

Kazaks witnessed historical events that occurred in Mongolia, entered into fraternal relations with Mongolians, and began living as a Mongolian ethnic group. The Mongolian government allocated land to them following their arrival. It also encouraged them to develop their cultural traditions while providing opportunities and necessary conditions to retain their customs in order to transmit them to future generations. The Mongolian government also adopted laws and issued decrees respecting their rights, which is reflected in the country’s constitution. Because of these government policies, the “Mongolian Kazakhs” are considered to have preserved their national tradition, language, and culture, transmitted from their ancestors, to a greater extent than other Kazakhs living in other countries. Professor Abduali Khaidarov, Ph.D., academician of the Academy of Science and head of the Kazakh Language Association, stressed the validity of these claims in his speech to the first congress of the World Association of Kazakhs. Khaidarov stated: “Scholars who study [the] Kazakh language abroad and review the Kazakh language, say that it is preserved in its [original] nature in Bayan-Ölgii, and the people [speaking it] are the Mongolian Kazakhs” (Daryejaboye 2013).

In every country, there are groups of people who can be distinguished by language, culture, and religion. As mentioned above, the Kazakhs are accepted as the largest ethnic minority in Mongolia. Thus, although Chapter One, Article 8, Section 1 of the Mongolian Constitution, which was adopted in 1992, decrees that “the Mongolian language is the official language of the state,” a provision was made in Article 8, Section 2 specifying that this “does not affect the right of ethnic minorities of the population to use their mother tongue in education and communication and in the pursuit of cultural, artistic, and scientific activities.” Furthermore, Chapter Two, Article 14, Section 2 stipulates that “No person may be discriminated against on the basis of ethnic origin, language, race, age, sex, social origin or status, wealth, occupation, position, religion, opinion, or education; everyone is a person before the law.”

The concept of a “national minority” was discussed within a conceptual framework of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and religion in the 1966 United Nations’ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations 1998). The most

common characterization used throughout the world defines an ethnic minority as “individuals who identify as members of a group that do not occupy a dominant position in the country, and differ from the majority population in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, or language” (United Nations 1998). The *International Human Rights Terminology Guide* (2000) defines a “minority” as “a certain group of people which is small in number compared to the majority of the state’s population, distinguished by language, race, or culture with a desire to preserve their distinctive hallmarks.” We conclude from these definitions that a minority is a certain group of people that is distinguished by language, customs, race, or religion.

The Mongolian government protects the rights of minorities and is committed to improving their social and cultural life, carrying out intelligent policies, and undertaking relevant measures. An early expression of this approach was the appeal of the Mongolian People’s Party (MPP) sent to its national minorities in 1922, which stated that one of the “primary goals of the MPP is to liberate Mongolian ethnic and multi-ethnic groups from foreign and domestic exploitation, to provide for their economic and cultural development and equal participation in government, and to support their national cultures and traditions” (Khasbaatar 1986). In addition, with the involvement of ethnic and minority groups in the western part of the country, the People’s Government of Mongolia established the first Kazakh *khoshuu*⁴⁾ in 1923. In 1940, important provisions were added that included training of national personnel abroad, establishing the Bayan-Ölgii Province for the Kazakh and Uriankhai⁵⁾ minorities, founding ethnic cultural and art centers, and starting schools with classes in the national language. From the earliest days of the Bayan-Ölgii Province, highly qualified staff were invited from Soviet Kazakhstan to give advice on projects such as strengthening the material base of the schools, improving teaching activities, building and furnishing new schools, developing academic programs, textbooks, and handbooks, and transferring instruction in the schools from the old writing system to a new script. In 1972, the Institute of Pedagogy, following Resolution No.216 of the Council of Ministers of the People’s Republic of Mongolia, put the Kazakh schools’ pedagogical sector in charge of the work to modify the curriculum, but this effort was abolished in 1992. Although legislation and state policies have been designed to implement and protect the rights of minority children to be educated, their access to information, and communication in their mother tongue, these children have significant problems and difficulties getting a quality education due to cultural and language differences. Thus, better coordination of state policy, with legal reinforcement, is needed to improve the quality of education for children from ethnic minorities. To satisfy this need, the Kazakh children’s educational study sector was established in 2010 at the Institute of Education, and research is being done to assess the Mongolian language teaching program, which has been taught in Bayan-Ölgii Province schools, and to determine the Mongolian to Kazakh language ratio.

3. Falconry as a Symbol of Kazakh Identity

3.1 Falconry in Mongolia

In the high mountainous region of Mongolia's Altai range, there are petroglyphs depicting birds of prey capturing booty that date from 3000–2000 BC. There are many petroglyphs in this region describing various hunting birds and local herders. In fact, they still follow the tradition of teaching hunting practices to eagles. The petroglyphs that were found in the Mongolian Altai Baga Oigor depict the hunting birds in a special way (Erdenebat 2014).

Arabs, Turks, and Central Asian nomads enjoyed taming birds of prey and used them for hunting. Ancient Turks hunted with tamed wild birds of prey in the seventh century, which was written on the stone memorial statues of the time. French traveler Guillaume de Rubrouck observed in his travel notes of 1253–1255 that “Nomads go getting birds of prey such as falcons in [their] right hand, hiding their eyes with something.” Italian traveler Marco Polo wrote in his *Book of the Marvels of the World* that the “Great king has many eagles which hunt deer, wolves, fox, [and] antelopes. They hunt many forms of prey. The largest, most powerful, eagles hunt wolves. No wolf can escape from their hooked snout.”

Central Asian nomads hunted with birds of prey in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, a fact which is often mentioned in tales and legends. Kazakh Ablai Khan in the eighteenth century had about 500 eagles and 300 hawks. The folk poet Mohamed Khanafiya as well as the modern poet Abai Kunanbayev wrote vivid poems describing these famous birds. Many documentary films and works of art on this subject have also been made (Sultan 2014). Training and hunting with birds of prey such as hawks, falcons, and eagles is called *shuvuulakh* in Mongolian and this method expanded greatly during the Mongol Empire, as recorded in historical documents. However, contemporary Mongolians have already stopped taming birds of prey. Today, only Bayan-Ölgii Kazakhs still hunt with eagles (Erdenebat 2014).

The Kazakhs who settled in Mongolia did not lose their ancestral tradition of training eagles for hunting and continued to use them for subsistence activities. During the communist regime, traditional rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies were forbidden, but training eagles for hunting was not prohibited. Furthermore, this has developed from an ancient tradition and has been transmitted from generation to generation until today (Bikhumar 1995, Soma 2014). They mainly tamed female golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and hunted for fox, wolves, and corsac. Since Mongolia has transitioned to a market economy, this tradition has become a tourist production that is displayed to the world. Although this tourism display is a new economic form that generates income, the Kazakh tradition of using eagles for making a living has continued.

3.2 The Eagle as a symbol of the Kazakhs of Mongolia

A good horse, a hunting eagle, and a beautiful dombra⁶⁾ are the three inherited treasures in Kazakh people's lives. The hunting eagle is the supporter of the Kazakh people's holy desires and pleasures of life (Baast 1960).

The eagle is one of the most widespread bird symbols in the world. During the Roman Empire, it was believed that the god Zeus' anger turned into an eagle, some said Zeus turned himself into an eagle (Tryessidor 1999). According to historical sources, the eagle represents power, glory, and valor, and is a symbol of the mind. Eagles and their representations are widespread throughout the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Eastern Africa, and the king of birds is renowned worldwide for its beauty, power, courage, and wisdom. For more than 2500 years, since the time of Imperial Rome's eagle standard, Austria, Germany, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Spain, Libya, Mexico, Poland, Syria, and Kazakhstan have chosen this mighty bird for their national flags and official seals.

Similarly, Bayan-Ölgii, where 91% of the Mongolian Kazakhs live, chose the eagle as its provincial symbol. The emblem shows an eagle wearing a breastplate ornamented with the peak of Altai Tavan Bogd, unique folk craft elements, sheaves of grain that had become a source of livelihood, a double frame with a heart-shaped flame of fire in the middle, and the Mongolian Kereit tribal seal. The 12 long feathers on each of the eagle's wings symbolized 12 years, 12 months that had come and passed away⁷.

People's values and ideals are reflected in how they formulate the world in their imagination. The poem "Eagle" by talented Kazakh poet B. Akhtaan (1959) is based on a legend about hunting with an eagle that was discussed greatly among the Kazakh people. In this poem, many aspects of their eagle tradition are described, such as how to tame and train an eagle chick, the difference between rich people who use the eagle for their own enjoyment and poor people who use eagles to help them survive, and the human aspiration to live free like an eagle.

The Kazakh people have many respectful names for their eagles, such as "Blue Sky," "Diva of the Sky," "King of Birds," "Owner of the Steppe," "Best Eagle," and "Brighter Warrior" (Altangul 2012). They have been immortalized in the stories of the Kazakhs who have danced with the eagle as well as being included in songs and poems that celebrate the courage, capability, and brilliant character of the eagle.

However, this does not mean that every Kazakh person has trained an eagle. Only some of the herders who live in the countryside have taken young female eagles from the mountain, fed and tamed them, and learned the art of hunting with eagles. This is supported by the following research. Of a total of 259 people who participated in our survey about people who have trained an eagle, 67.2% of them have trained 1-6 eagles, while 27.8% have trained 7-20 eagles, and 5% have trained 21-50 eagles. Some people have specialized in bringing wild eagles from the mountain and do the work to provide other people with eagles. For example, Murat Esentai, a citizen of Sagsai *soum*, has fed eagles for about 20 years. During this time, he has captured a total of 110 female eagles and has given away or sold 109 of them. On the other hand, Axtishkhan Bektemir, a citizen of Tolbo *soum*, has fed eagles for about 55 years. During this time, he has captured a total of 50 eagles and has given 35 of them to other people (Tsevenmyadag, Samiya, and Atai 2014).

There is no better example of making a close bond between a person and nature than to feed and tame an eagle. This is also seen in the relationship between the eagle and the person who has been feeding it. The person who has been feeding the young

eagle loves it very much until it is time to capture it. Murat Esentai and Axtishkhan Bektemir did not take hatchlings from their nests that were unable to fly yet; they took only young eagles that had fledged. This is because it is easier to feed eagles that are able to fly and have already acquired a natural ability to hunt only the animals that they are able to stand against, also they make less noise and when released into nature after many years they don't attack livestock (Tsevenmyadag, Samiya, and Atai 2014).

The eagle was the meaning of life for Kazakh men and was related to the nomadic Kazakh culture. However, many people who were feeding eagles previously have not fed an eagle for many years. A total of 71.0% of the eagles being fed are between 1 to 4 years old and all of them are released back into the wild at 5 or 6 years old, although they continue to feed some eagles that have the ability to hunt for up to 10 years. They feed female eagles only. Experts agree on releasing an eagle back into nature after feeding it for 4 to 5 years in order to maintain the natural balance.

Researchers have said that to ordinary citizens, an eagle means a contribution to their well-being, but to wealthy citizens it can restore fortune; it also offers people experience of the miracle of hunting and is a type of both art and sport. Falconry is the people's preference, but it is important to establish biodiversity conservation, the development of methods and techniques for taming wild animals, and protection of the environment (Tsookhuu and Bikhumar 2006).

An integral part of nomadic herding culture is the collection of supplemental food in the winter, which has the additional benefit of providing fur for making clothes, providing cold-proof insulation, and creating sellable goods. It is very difficult to find water birds to hunt for food in winter because these nomads live in an extremely cold climate. Therefore, the taming of water birds for hunting has not developed in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia. Meanwhile, eagles do catch fur-bearing mammals. Recently, however, eagles were trained in this region for the purpose of sport or enjoyment, for traditional rituals, or to obtain fur, rather than for the procurement of food (Erdenebat 2014).

The transmission of falconry has been significantly influenced by many factors including the pleasant ecological living conditions of eagles. Kazakh men are herders who live close to animals and birds and they have experience in training eagles. Eagle training has changed into an economically significant practice that differs from traditional cultural events.

An entire culture has grown around the eagle. It is defined by the daily relationship between an eagle and her owner, which includes actions such as being trained for hunting, preparing the clothes to be worn when handling an eagle, taming, and rehabilitation (Altangul 2012). The eagle is a symbol of courage for Kazakh men, and falconry continues to bring great pride to the descendants of famous hunters.

During the implementation of the Golden Eagle Management Program in 2002, there was a survey taken of 241 people involved in eagle feeding and hunting. Of those questioned, 173 people were trained by their fathers and relatives, 48 people learned these practices from relatives, and 19 people reported learning from their friends; the survey also considered skills to be passed down by fathers (Tsevenmyadag, Samiya, and

Atai 2014). Feeding eagles makes a valuable contribution to mankind's history of feeding wild animals. For a man, feeding an eagle represents a personal accomplishment, a kind of sport, as well as a good way to spend leisure time (Photos 1, 2, 3, 4).



Photo 1 A Kazakh hunter with his eagle in Ölgii City, western Mongolia, 2007.



Photo 2 Kazakh hunters with eagles in Sayat Tolgoi Bugat, 2013.



Photo 3 A Kazakh hunter in Sayat Tolgoi Bugat, 2013.



Photo 4 A Kazakh hunter showing his eagle to spectators in Sayat Tolgoi Bugat, 2013.

3.3 How Eagles are fed and tamed

Eagle training and hunting is a man's occupation. However, when Russian-Israeli photographer Eshyer Svidyenskii traveled in 2014 to the Bayan-Ölgii area for 4 months to investigate falconers (*bürkítshi* or *burgedchin*), in particular, young apprentice hunters⁸), he became acquainted with a 13-year-old girl named Aksholpan and learned about it from her. His report was published in National Geographic in April 2014 and created a worldwide sensation. It challenged the traditional understanding that the activity is only for men and provided significant evidence demonstrating that women are also learning these hunting practices.

In the case of traditional eagle feeding, Kazakh women love and respect eagles because they hatch and help provide their special food. They prepare the men's hunting gear and equipment and make their outer garments (Altangul 2012). Caring for the men's specialized hunting gear is an activity among women that is regarded as equivalent to feeding eagles.

Kazakh men teach their sons how to catch eagles and take proper care of them. This personal involvement helps transmit the practices to the next generation. Eshyer Svidyenskii reported that "when boys reach the age of 13 and have the strength to carry a large adult eagle, they are taught hunting skills. Among the Kazakh people, all traditional hunting skills were taught in the family."

However, an eagle is a very sensitive and alert animal that is used to being fed by its own master's hand; if fed by a stranger, it may become dangerous and attack. Moreover, from an early age, Kazakhs play a major role in the protection and love of nature as well as raising animals—this is their inheritance and their legacy to their children, and Kazakh children are raised with a true sense of the relationship between nature and people, which in modern terms represents bringing up eco-friendly minded individuals.

When a Kazakh hunter catches an eagle hatchling, his whole family gathers in joy and his wife wears the yellow tail feathers to keep away bad luck. Elderly family members gather around, inspect the eagle, and *akhsakhal* (the eldest and the wisest man in Kazakh)⁹) blesses it so that it will become the "best hunting eagle."

There are many observances related to eagles among the Mongolian Kazakh, who cherish eagles. They do not eat eagle, but they do keep eagle wings, talons, tail feathers, and syrinxes for the purposes of folk medicine. Kazakhs may show an eagle to someone who is frightened and put it on that person's head. A Kazakh stated: "When I was a child my grandmother had [some] small eagle feet. I clearly remember that sometimes our neighbors would ask to borrow the feet for some reason, like when their little baby could not sleep well at night or their daughter-in-law was about to give birth, and so on" (Altangul 2014).

3.4 Folk Beliefs about Eagles

Many superstitions involving eagles are still believed; for example, striking someone who is frightened with an eagle's tail or wing¹⁰), fill a pillow with eagle's down to prevent headaches, attach an eagle's talon to a pregnant woman's belt so that she delivers without

any difficulties, and hang some eagle's down over the bed when a baby cries with fright. If someone brought an eagle at the same time a child is born, it is taken as a good sign and the baby's name is given to the eagle, or the eagle's name is given to the newborn. Therefore, there are many names related to eagles among Kazakhs. As symbols of courage and power, boys are named Burkit (Eagle), Burkitbai, Khos Burkit (Couple Eagle), Sarsha (Sandy), and Kiran (Brave), whereas many girls are named Lashin, which is the name of a young eagle (Altangul 2012).

When the family moves residence, the head of the household must carry the eagle. If the head of the household is absent, only a man may carry the eagle or they can set it down on the back of a camel. If an eagle dies accidentally, they bury it on the mountaintop where it was first found in order to honor it (Sultan 2014). When an eagle is approximately 8 years old, Kazakhs bring it in the spring to a mountaintop with a slaughtered sheep and release it there. This way the eagle is free again to enjoy the open sky (Svidensky 2014).

4. The Eagle Festival: Connectedness of the Kazakhs

4.1 The development of the Mongolian Kazakh's Eagle Festival

In 1950, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of Bayan-Ölgii Province, a demonstration of an eagle catching a fox was held in the center of Ulaanbaatar City. In addition, a meeting of *bürkitshi* was organized by an initiative of the executive administrative bodies of Bayan-Ölgii Province. These were the very first public events (Sultan 2014).

Nowadays, the eagle is the carrier of the traditional culture. On the other hand, the eagle is also a part of a new economic trend. The Eagle Festival is a very interesting and unique production that attracts foreign tourists, thus providing a good opportunity for the development of regional tourism.

Since 2000, the administrative bodies of Bayan-Ölgii Province have given an order to organize the annual Eagle Festival during the first week of October. This decision has caught the attention of both domestic and foreign tourists. During the ceremony, local residents and *bürkitshi* give a public demonstration in the center of Ölgii *soum* in Bayan-Ölgii Province. Afterwards, *bürkitshi* astonish onlookers with the abilities of their regal birds. I attended this ceremony for the first time in October 2007 at Ölgii *soum*. However in 2013, the demonstration and contest were held together in Sayat Tolgoi (which is 18 km from Ölgii *soum*), not in Ölgii *soum* itself. That festival highlighted all of the characteristics of the nomadic lifestyle, such as traveling by camel and setting children in boxes that straddle both sides of the camel. There was also a craft fair at the event, where different kinds of handmade products made by local people were sold. These included traditional felt garments made from wool, cow leather handicrafts, and indigenous coats (*shapan*) or hats made of fox fur. Some people who had tamed eagles did not enter the competition, but they took the opportunity to show their eagles to the public and earn some money by allowing pictures to be taken with their eagles. The event appears to have been versatile and complex. The Eagle Festival was organized by Z.

Kazbek, the Director of the Altai Tour Company, Edelkhan, the Manager of the Altai Tour Company, and C. Medejkhan Kazbek, the Director of the Orman Company. They also founded the Association of *Bürkitshi*, which has more than 200 members (Soma 2014, Altangul 2014). Kanat, the Director of Blue Wolf Travel, has organized the Golden Eagle Festival since 2000 and founded a club called the Heavenly Golden Eagle Association in 2007. At present, it has more than 400 members. Since 2007, right before *Nauryz*, the traditional New Year's celebration, Kazakhs have held eagle ceremonies not only in Bayan-Ölgii but also in other cities, especially near Ulaanbaatar. In 2007, 15 *bürkitshi* came from Bayan-Ölgii to Terelj Gorkhi to demonstrate methods to locals as well as foreign tourists; in 2008, the number of *bürkitshi* participating increased to 20. The exhibition resulted from the initiative of Ambassador K. Sairan, a former member of parliament. The event publicized the Altai *bürkitshi*, as well as making Kazakh heritage available to the members of this minority who live in cities far from their homeland (Altangul 2012). Since 2011, Chinggis Town Tourist Company has been a supporter of this festival. In 2014, more than 500 people attended the event, including foreign ambassadors to Mongolia, representatives of international companies, foreign tourists, Ulaanbaatar citizens, and Kazakhs.

Many organizations have worked together to organize the celebration, including the Department of Culture and Tourism, the Council of Bayan-Ölgii Province, the Tourist Association of Mongolia, the Association of *Bürkitshi*, and the Wild Animal Protection Centre of Mongolia. The purpose of the event is to transmit, spread, and publicize the methods that have been inherited by the Kazakh people, to develop it as a new attraction in regional tourism, and to enhance the responsibility of all participants to nurture and protect nature. This year, there were 18 eagles, the youngest owner was 17 years old, and the oldest owner was 60. During the festival, prizes were awarded to the *bürkitshi* who was wearing the best traditional ethnic costume, who had the most beautiful eagle, who had the best horse equipment, and so on. *Bürkitshi* competed in picking up wrapped coins from the ground while riding on horseback to demonstrate that their eagle was the most well trained, show whose eagle was the best attached, prove whose eagle excelled at catching animals, and the like. In 2014, a conference was organized for the first time and its theme was "The eagle: its biological characteristics, [importance to] historical heritage, and role in tourism." The conference proceedings were also printed as a book. It was a very good start to scientifically record observations related to eagles and *bürkitshi*. *Bürkitshi* came to the conference in their national costume carrying their eagles with them, capturing the attention of the people and making the conference more interesting and practical.

In addition to the Bayan-Ölgii, Kazakhs who live in Nalaikh District and Sharin Gol *soum* tame eagles as well. K. Sarkit, who is 38 years old and from Nalaikh, has tamed eagles for 4 or 5 years. He brought a 1-year-old baby eagle from Bayan-Ölgii. However, he does not use it to hunt; instead, he uses it for business purposes in Terelj Gorkhi national park where he earns money by allowing people to take pictures with his eagle. Sarkit¹¹⁾ realized that most tourists are not able to go to Bayan-Ölgii Province to see the eagles but many do visit Terelj Gorkhi, so it would be a good idea for him, who lives

nearby, to show eagles to the tourists. Currently, he has four eagles and one vulture. The birds eat meat, about 800 grams of meat per bird per day, a daily total of 3 kg of meat. Recently, urban Kazakhs have become interested in including the eagle during their wedding ceremony and feast, so Sarkit habituated one eagle to the melody of the *khara jorga*, a Kazakh folk dance, and trained the bird to flap its wings and appear to dance with them, for which he received payment. Mongolian National Television prepared a special program about this eagle trainer in 2013, which was broadcast on television. Since then, people have gotten to know him well and when he does not want to display his eagles, they come to his house to see them (Interview, September 7, 2013).

Due to the increased economic interest discussed above, the number of people feeding eagles is growing, which has led to an issue of finding sufficient food for them. The Tundra Eagle in Mongolia Society, established in Bayan-Ölgii Province in 2002 to implement the Tundra Eagle Management Program, currently has over 380 members. For enactment of the program, the Bayan-Ölgii Province Environmental Protection Agency, the Mongolian Altai Range's Special Protected Area administration, *soum* and local environmental inspectors, and guards are all working together. The Tundra Eagle in Mongolia Society issues a certificate to the eagle trainer for each eagle that is being fed and has started an integrated database for the purposes of registration and research. In addition, the Society made a 15-year cooperative agreement with Mr. Seiji Terauchi, President of Japan's National Archery Association, to collect molted eagle feathers and sell them to Japanese archers for an appropriate price. Within the Tundra Eagle Management Program, important measures have been taken, such as establishing the Golden Eagle Festival, meetings, information dissemination to the general public by radio and television, and the publication of articles in both domestic and foreign journals about research results (Tsevenmyadag, Samiya, and Atai 2014).

Tradition in Mongolia is an example for other countries. After Kazakhstan declared its independence, Kazakhstan's National Sports Association organized the First International Festival of *Bürkitshi* near Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, from November 28–30, 2013. During the festival, a total of 60 falconers from 10 countries competed in tests of speed, power, and deftness. Twenty-five eagle trainers from Kazakhstan, 14 from China, 13 from Mongolia, 5 from Kyrgyzstan, 1 from Uzbekistan, and one each from European countries including Spain, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia participated in the festival. Falconers competed in two categories such as eagle training and hunting (divided by the animal hunted: rabbit, fox, or wolf). At the festival, according to the total number of awards, the Kazakh eagle trainers led, Mongolian eagle trainers took second place, and the Chinese team was awarded third place. Kazakhstan's National Sports Federation Vice President Byekbolat Tlyeukhan said "Hunting with eagles is a whole science. Love this work, devote yourself to this work so you can be a real hunter. To preserve the old tradition, we changed it into a sport. We established rules and created sports terms and a title granting system. Currently only 100 people are engaged in falconry in Kazakhstan. Most of them are elderly. Thus, this tradition was changed into one resembling a sport in order to attract young people. This year, 400 million *tenge* (which is equivalent to 2,200,000 USD) were spent for the recovery of

falconry. During the festival, academic conferences were held and exhibitions were opened. Kazakhstan has been preparing to organize the Olympic Games of the Falconers during the international exhibition “EXPO Astana 2017” that will be held in Astana in 2017”. While Kazakhstan has a population of over 16 million and more than 100 eagle trainers, the vast majority of them are elderly; Mongolia has 300–400 eagle trainers from a population of about 101,000 Kazakhs. They are a good example of people who did not lose their traditional culture. UNESCO recognized Mongolian eagle trainers by registering their falconry on their list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010.

We organized the Eagle Day event and are ignoring real work in order to introduce the culture and customs of the Mongolian Kazakh people to foreign tourists and the domestic audience, as well as ensuring these traditions are passed on to future generations, but there has not been a steady increase in the number of tourists. This is primarily because events mainly take place in Bayan-Ölgii Province, which is very remote and characterized by a lack of air transportation and high ticket prices. The infrastructure is not very good, not all of the hotels meet modern standards, and camps are scarce. Overall, the area suffers from not having a coordinated tourism policy. The annual *Nauryz* holiday, which takes place at the spring equinox, is usually held in Ulaanbaatar in March. Although it is widely celebrated, there is a lack of promotional efforts linking the holiday with activities (or organizing too many activities at the same time) including travel packages. They also have not followed the pattern of some other countries of delaying the celebration of holidays to weekends, which would extend the time available to travel. Therefore, there are only a small number of domestic and foreign tourists in Bayan-Ölgii Province; even considering the Kazakhs who live around the city of Ulaanbaatar.

4.2 The tradition of falconry among Kazakhs in Mongolia is becoming a popular topic of research

Kazakh researcher Kh. Bikhumar has been studying eagles, including all aspects of domestic consumption, traditions, and symbols, for many years. In 2005, he published the monograph *Kazakh People's Bird Hunting and the Training and Conditioning of Race Horse Customs*, and in 2006, he published the photo album *Eagle* with H. Tsookhuu. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) made special broadcasts in 2003 and 2010. In addition, domestic and foreign scholars have been engaged in recent research articles published in English. This has played an important role in expanding the research on Mongolian Kazakhs, eagles, and falconry.

It has also influenced trends related to contemporary ethnic and anthropological studies, provided information to the general public and drawn the attention of international scholars to the work of recording, preserving, and transmitting this cultural heritage. Among them, the Japanese researcher Takuya Soma is conducting a comprehensive survey of eagles. He is focusing on falconry characteristics, ethnology, and anthropology of the Kyrgyz and Mongolian Kazakhs. Among others, he published the following articles: “Contemporary Falconry among Altai-Kazakhs in Western

Mongolia,” “The Art of Horse-Riding Falconry by Altai-Kazakh Hunters,” “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Arts and Knowledge for Co-existing with Golden Eagles,” “Horseback Falconry of Altai-Kazakh Hunters,” “Horse-Riding Falconry in Altai-Kazakh Nomadic Society,” “Ethno-archaeology of Eagle Falconry in Altaic Kazakhs,” and, with S. Battulga, “Altai Kazakh Falconry as Heritage Tourism: The Golden Eagle Festivals of Western Mongolia.” French photographer Roland Michaud published *Chasse à l’aigle chez les Kazaks* in 2001 and Stephen J. Bodio published *Eagle Dreams: Searching for Legends in Wild Mongolia* in 2003. *National Geographic* magazine, reporting on correlations between the environment, wildlife, and people in the region, issued full photo reports in 1999 and 2014, greatly facilitating knowledge of this intangible cultural heritage to the world.

Falconry has been regularly publicized on Mongolian National Television as well as commercial television stations, newspapers, magazines, and websites as a special national feature. Eagle Day has been promoted as well, and a movie related to falconry was produced.

5. Conclusion

Thanks to appropriate policies of the Mongolian Government, the Mongolian Kazakhs have maintained and protected their traditions. Continuing the traditions surrounding *bürkitshí* was a key factor in creating the modern Eagle Festival event, along with passing down this knowledge to the next generation and presenting it to international tourists.

The eagle is ever present in the everyday life of Kazakhs. This winged creature became a source and a symbol of their pride. Kazakhs feed eagles for two reasons. Some of them feed and hunt with eagles for the purpose of subsistence, which includes making winter clothing in the traditional way. Hunting fox and corsac for their furs with eagles plays an important role in Kazakh communities. In order to make one man’s hat, a significant number of corsac tails are needed. It is true that a fox fur hat is very warm, but it also serves to express wealth.

For Kazakhs, feeding eagles has become a modern subsistence activity, with the goal of sending *bürkitshí* to the competition to showcase the talents of their eagle and their own training skills. Since its transition to a market economy, Mongolia has been organizing Eagle Day on a regular basis. Its aim was to provide eagle trainers with opportunities to enter capitalist society, keep their traditional culture, and to be able to learn from each other. During this period, the Association of *Bürkitshí* (2000) and the Heavenly Golden Eagle Association (2007) were established to protect the interests of the *bürkitshí* and to integrate them into structured institutions. The interest in eagle feeding has increased, but under current market conditions eagle hunters face a new problem of providing them sufficient food. In 2002, the Golden Eagle Management Program was started to address such issues as the promotion of the Kazakh’s eagle feeding tradition and to increase eagle trainers’ revenues.

The Mongolian Kazakhs have played an important role in recording falconry and

feeding birds, activities that were recognized by UNESCO as a form of intangible cultural heritage. They will continue to be of great importance in the future, as they convey traditional falconry methods to younger generations, develop our understanding of the complex relationships between humans and nature, and promote sustainable development.

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Notes

- 1) One of the tribes of Kazakhs (Middle Juz).
- 2) Kazakhs train eagles, not hawks or falcons, used for hunting.
- 3) In August 1940, due to the decision of the Eighth Conference of the People’s Republic of Mongolia, Bayan-Ölgii Province was separated from Khovd Province, and there were 10 *sums* (administrative sub-divisions), 71 *bags* (smaller units than *sum*), 7063 households, 33,300 thousand people, and 847,900 livestock.
- 4) An administration unit similar to a province.
- 5) Another ethnic minority in Mongolia.
- 6) A Kazakh musical instrument, the long-necked lute.
- 7) Official Website of Bayan-Ölgii Province (Internet, December 1, 2014, <http://www.bayan-Ölgii.gov.mn/pages/introduction>).
- 8) National Geographic (Internet, December 1, 2014, <http://nationalgeographic.mn/mod-15/i-1226/>).
- 9) The eldest male member (or female if there is no any elder male) of the tribe or household (nowadays).
- 10) This is done to banish the fear.
- 11) On May 23, 2014, K. Sarkit attended B. Khamzalyn’s son’s wedding and danced the *khara jorga* with his eagle.

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