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## Migration to the “Historical Homeland” : Remaking Connectedness in Kazakh Society beyond National Borders

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## **Migration to the “Historical Homeland”: Remaking Connectedness in Kazakh Society beyond National Borders**

**Toko Fujimoto**

*National Museum of Ethnology*

### **1. Introduction**

This paper deals with “return migration” and the process of remaking connectedness after the migration. Here, “return migration” means the migration of people to the country that they consider as their “homeland,” where their own ethnic group occupies the majority of the population. After the return migration, remaking connectedness as part of an ethnic group beyond national borders is crucial for the returnees. Although return migration is caused by various circumstances and occurs worldwide, the newly acquired independence of a state, related to regime change, is the factor of the case of Kazakhs in Central Asia that we shall specifically examine in the present paper<sup>1)</sup>.

Migration in Central Asia has been closely related to the regime changes that occurred in the twentieth century in this region. For example, under the socialist regime in the former Soviet Union, certain kinds of migration were strongly restricted. Some groups that had often moved, such as Kazakh nomads and hunter-gatherers in Siberia, were sedentarized under the socialist modernization policy. In contrast, other ethnic groups such as Koreans and Germans were forced to migrate to Central Asia for political reasons. As a result, multi-ethnic countries were born in the Soviet Union.

However, when the various republics of the Soviet Union became independent in 1991, their societies began to be reconstructed under new political and economic regimes. Although Kazakhstan was a multi-ethnic country, many Russians, Ukrainians, and Germans left Kazakhstan. The government of newly independent Kazakhstan invited Kazakhs living abroad to return to Kazakhstan, which was defined by the government as “*tarikhi otani*”<sup>2)</sup>, the “historical homeland” of all Kazakhs living around the world. Under this policy, Kazakhs from abroad migrated to Kazakhstan. As a result, the returnees began to live together and mix with local Kazakhs in many areas of Kazakhstan.

I became interested in the issue of migration and connectedness during my long-term field research from 2003 to 2005 on the social reconstruction and religious dynamics of Kazakhstan. I heard the local Kazakhs sometimes talk about “*oralmandar*” (literally “returnees”), who are Kazakhs that migrated to Kazakhstan from Mongolia, China, Uzbekistan, and other countries. In Kazakhstan, returnees are differentiated from local Kazakhs and are sometimes discriminated against. At the same time, some local

Kazakhs mentioned to me that the returnees played important roles in opening a mosque in their area and in revitalizing rituals and festivals. Why did Kazakhs become divided by national borders, and why have some of them decided to migrate to Kazakhstan? Furthermore, how have they reconstructed their lives after migrating to Kazakhstan, and how have they made and remade their relationships with local Kazakhs?

In previous studies on social reconstruction in the post-Soviet period, it has been noted that revitalization of religious practices and festivals was a significant symbol for the identity of ethnic groups (Yamada 1999: 93–137; Balzer 1999; Glavatskaya 2004; Fujimoto 2011a, 2011b). Of these studies, a few pointed out the importance of the movement of an ethnic group beyond national borders (Shimamura 2013). To consider the reconstruction of society in the post-socialist space, migration to the “historical homeland” will be an important aspect because migrants from the same ethnic group have actively been involved in the revitalization of religious practices and festivals in some regions of the former Soviet Union and because this type of phenomenon has also been observed in non-socialist countries (Yamada 2014).

The literature on Kazakh society in the diaspora and the migration of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan has tended to focus on three areas: historical studies of the Kazakh diaspora (Mendikuliva 2006; Qoblandin and Mendikūlova 2009; Mukhamadi 2011; Matsubara 2011); ethnological and anthropological studies of Kazakhs abroad (Benson and Svanberg 1998; Finke 1999; Svanberg 1999; Battulga, 2007; Stasevich 2009; Diener 2009; Werner et al. 2013); and economic and political studies of returnee Kazakhs migrating to Kazakhstan from abroad (Oka 2008, 2010; Tatibekov 2010a, 2010b; Aleksenko 2010; Aitkazina 2010; Bonnenfant 2012).

Diener’s work is of particular interest as it is based on long-term field research both in Mongolia and Kazakhstan. He suggested the concept of a “stretching homeland” to “incorporate diasporic communities, sanctioning their hybridity in terms of territorialization within another state but ensuring that their bond to the “historic homeland” is not forgotten” (Diener 2009: 336). This concept is valuable for Kazakhs staying in Mongolia, but it does not explain how the returnees, some of whom migrated to Kazakhstan up to 20 years ago, reconstructed their lives there and how they remade their connectedness with local Kazakhs. A concern for returnees, as pointed out by Oka (2008, 2010), is that they face difficulties in areas such as language use and economic conditions. Furthermore, Tatibekov notes that religious aspects sometimes play an important role in distinguishing the returnees and local Kazakhs (Tatibekov 2010b: 205–207). Despite these studies, much remains to be examined regarding the process of remaking connectedness between returnees and local Kazakhs.

Therefore, this paper aims to clarify the process of remaking connectedness in an ethnic group that was divided by national borders, with a focus on returnees to Kazakhstan based on anthropological field research. In this paper, the term “connectedness” is defined as a way of making and remaking social relationships with others after regime change and/or migration. In contrast to other papers on migrants in this volume, this paper deals with the phenomena of a people migrating to a country where their ethnic group comprises the majority of the population.



**Figure 1** The main sites referred to in the paper

The main data were gathered in the Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province in Kazakhstan, where I conducted two and a half years of fieldwork at various intervals from 2003 to 2015. Additionally, I conducted interviews in the largest city, Almaty, in 2011, 2013, and 2014. I also conducted short-term fieldwork on Kazakhs living abroad in Ulaanbaatar and Bayan-Ölgii Province in Mongolia in 2011, 2013, and 2014, and in Tashkent in Uzbekistan in 2013 and 2014 (Fig. 1).

In Section 2, I will examine the historical background of Kazakh migration. Then, the migration after the independence of Kazakhstan will be discussed in Section 3. In Section 4, I look at the ways of making and remaking connectedness between returnees and local Kazakhs, with a focus on Islamic practices and the *Nawrız* festival, which were both severely restricted during the socialist period and revitalized after Kazakhstan’s independence. In Section 5, the paper concludes by discussing the meaning of return migration and the ways of remaking connectedness, based on a case study of Kazakhs.

## 2. Kazakhs and the National Borders of Socialist and Post-Socialist Countries

### 2.1 Division by national borders and restriction of migration

Kazakhs live in various countries besides Kazakhstan, including China, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Mongolia. Kazakhs outside of Kazakhstan are often called “*sheteldegı qazaqtar*” (Kazakhs abroad). This concept became widely used after the independence of Kazakhstan. That is to say, this categorization of Kazakhs abroad came about with the emergence of an independent Kazakhstan. In 2009, approximately 10,097,000 Kazakhs lived in Kazakhstan (Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2010: 9). However, the exact number of Kazakhs abroad is not clear. According to the statistics of each country, the largest community of Kazakhs abroad is in China (1,460,000 in 2010)<sup>3</sup>. The second largest is likely in Uzbekistan (810,000 in 1989)<sup>4</sup>, although the government of Uzbekistan has not carried out a survey on ethnicity since independence in 1991. The

third largest community of Kazakhs abroad is in Russia (650,000 in 2010)<sup>5)</sup> and the fourth largest is in Mongolia (101,500 in 2010) (National Statistical Office of Mongolia 2011: 26). Kazakhs also live in Turkey, Iran, and some countries in Europe (Svanberg 1999: 13; Mendikulova 2006: 8). To sum up, the number of Kazakhs abroad is approximately 3,000,000.

One reason why Kazakhs are so widely distributed is that they were historically nomads who moved a long distance every year across the Central Eurasian Steppe. The Kazakh Khanate was built as a nomadic state following the Mongolian Empire in the fifteenth century. At its peak, the Kazakh Khanate included present-day Kazakhstan, as well as parts of Uzbekistan and Russia. The Kazakhs divided themselves into three *jüz* (hordes), which were unions of patrilineal clans, called *ru*. The belongingness to patrilineal clans and to *jüz* is important for Kazakhs even today<sup>6)</sup>.

The other reason why Kazakhs are so widely distributed is that they were divided by the borders of modern states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in the process, further migration occurred. In the nineteenth century, the Kazakh Khanate was gradually invaded by the Russian Empire; at the same time, some Kazakhs moved to China, which was under the Qing Dynasty. Later, some Kazakhs (mainly the *Abaq Kerey*, which is a part of the *Kerey* clan of the *Orta Jüz*) moved to the current territory of Mongolia from China (Muhamadiüli 2011). In the first half of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union was established as the world's first socialist state, and the Peoples' Republic of Mongolia as the second. Later, at the mid-twentieth century, the People's Republic of China was established. During this process, some Kazakhs moved beyond national borders to escape the political turmoil. Some Kazakhs moved as far away from China as Turkey (Matsubara 2011). As the national borders were demarcated by the governments, movement across borders became difficult<sup>7)</sup>.

## 2.2 Kazakh Society under socialist and post-socialist regimes

Consequently, most Kazakhs experienced modernization under socialism in three socialist countries: the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, and China. Under the socialist regimes in these three countries, the collectivization and anti-religious campaigns experienced by Kazakhs differed. In the former Soviet Union, collectivization was accompanied by forced sedentarization of Kazakh nomads<sup>8)</sup>. They were organized into collective farms (*kolkhoz*) in the late 1920s and into state farms (*sovkhos*) in the 1950s. On the contrary, collectivization in Mongolia was not accompanied by forced sedentarization. As a result, Kazakhs in Mongolia, as well as the Mongols, maintained a relatively migratory way of life and continued to use yurts (*kiiz üy*), nomadic tents made of wood and felt. In China, the socialist regime was established in 1949, and Kazakhs living there also largely maintained their way of life.

Anti-religious campaigns are another significant point to consider for Kazakh society under socialist regimes. In the former Soviet Union, the anti-religious campaign began in the 1930s, but loosened somewhat in the 1940s when the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana, SADUM) was founded as an official organization. After that Islamic

practices were not banned, but they were restricted by the government. In Mongolia, where a severe anti-religious campaign was carried out in the 1930s, an official organization for Muslims was not formed until after the end of the socialist regime, although a mosque existed during the period from 1948/1949 to 1956 (Mongholiya müsılman üyümdarı odaghı 2010: 18–19). In China, religious practices were relatively free before the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. After the Cultural Revolution, Kazakhs gradually began to revitalize their Islamic practices in the 1980s using knowledge passed on from elders in society.

In the former Soviet Union and Mongolia, the revitalization of Islam began around 1990, due to an abrupt change in policy. The Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (Qazaqstan müsılmandarı dını basqarması, QMDB) was founded in 1990, separate from SADUM, to develop Islam in Kazakhstan. In Mongolia, a private organization called the Mongolian Muslim Society (Mongholiya müsılman qogamı, MMQ) was founded in 1990 and played a significant role in revitalizing Islam among the Kazakhs there (Fujimoto 2014). MMQ was reorganized into the Union of Muslim Societies in Mongoliya (Mongholiya müsılman üyümdarı odaghı, MMÜO) in 2007 (Mongholiya müsılman üyümdarı odaghı 2010: 53).

The ethnic relations in each country were also different. In the former Soviet Union, the ultimate goal was the creation of a “Soviet people.” However, ethnicity was also played an important role, and each Soviet republic was named after the predominant ethnic group. Upon independence of the Central Asian countries from the Soviet Union, each republic’s government afforded a degree of privilege to the titular nationality. Thus, Kazakhs became the majority and the titular ethnic group in Kazakhstan. Simultaneously, Kazakhs in Uzbekistan were suddenly separated from Kazakhstan by the newly created national border and became an ethnic minority. In Mongolia and China, Kazakhs gained the status of a minor ethnic group during the socialist period, and the status remains the same today. In particular, Kazakhs are the largest minority ethnic group in Mongolia. Despite these differences in ethnic relations, Kazakhs in each country have the consciousness of being Kazakhs, and the sense of belonging to patrilineal clans, called *ru*, also continues to exist.

It is notable that Kazakh societies abroad present their culture in accordance with the social context of the region and the state in which they live, to maintain their culture and privilege while living as an ethnic minority. For example, in Mongolia, Kazakhs have some shared characteristics with Mongols as (former) nomads, the major ethnic group of which is Khalkha. The main differences between Kazakhs and Khalkha Mongols are religion, language, and some festivals, including *Nawrız* in spring (Photos 1, 2, 3), which we will examine later, and the Eagle Festival in autumn<sup>9</sup>). The Kazakh minority in Mongolia organized these festivals to revitalize and introduce their culture to the majority as well as to foreign tourists.

On the contrary, the majority ethnic group in Uzbekistan is Uzbeks, who are also Turkic people and Muslims like Kazakhs. The differences between Kazakhs and Uzbeks are not so emphasized, but Kazakhs try to keep their language and customs. The Cultural Center of Kazakhs, one of the cultural centers organized by each ethnic group according





**Photo 1** Kazakh children dancing at *Nawrız* festival in Ulaanbaatar, 2014.



**Photo 2** Kazakh children marching at *Nawrız* festival in Ulaanbaatar, 2014.



**Photo 3** Kazakhs celebrating the *Nawrız* festival in a yurt in Bayan-Ölgii Province of Mongolia, 2013.



**Photo 4** The booth organized by the Cultural Center of Kazakhs on the Day of Independence of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, 2014. The Picture of Töle-bi and the banner “Hope the friendship between Kazakhs and Uzbeks will be eternal!” are apparent behind the booth.



to the governmental policy of Uzbekistan, organizes children to sing and dance and sets up a booth in a park in the capital city twice in a year, at *Nawrız* and on the Day of Independence of Uzbekistan, which are the country's two main national holidays (Photo 4). Historical monuments, such as the Mausoleum of Töle-bi (1663–1756, a famous historical figure of the Kazakh Khanate) located in the capital city of Tashkent have also become a symbol of Kazakh society and of the symbiosis between Kazakhs and Uzbeks in Uzbekistan.

Thus, Kazakhs abroad have revitalized their culture in different ways according to the social context in the country where they live. Yet at the same time, in the 1990s and 2000s and to a lesser extent in the 2010s as well, some Kazakhs living abroad decided to migrate to Kazakhstan. In next section, we will examine this migration of Kazakhs to independent Kazakhstan.

### 3. Migration to Independent Kazakhstan

#### 3.1 Kazakhstan governmental policy inviting Kazakhs abroad

The government of Kazakhstan organized the World Association of Kazakhs (Düniejüzi qazaqtarı qauımdastıǵı) in 1992 for the purpose of strengthening the relationship between Kazakhstan and Kazakhs abroad, with a meeting referred to as “*Qıriltay (Kurultai)*” held in 1992, 2002, 2005, and 2011 (Mamashev 2012: 3; Mendikulova 2014: 283–298). In addition, the World Association of Kazakhs publishes books about Kazakhs abroad, issues magazines geared toward Kazakhs abroad, encourages students who are Kazakhs abroad to study at universities in Kazakhstan, and provides assistance for returnees in adapting to life back in Kazakhstan. These activities depend on the concept that Kazakhstan is the “historical homeland” for all Kazakhs. In fact, the territory where Kazakhs have lived has changed throughout their history, and it is difficult to say that all Kazakhs abroad lived in the current territory of Kazakhstan at some point. Despite this, all Kazakhs from abroad who migrate to Kazakhstan are called *oralman* or “returnees.”

It is noteworthy that the government of Kazakhstan particularly encouraged Kazakhs abroad to return to their “historical homeland” in 1990. One purpose of this policy was to increase the proportion of the Kazakh population in Kazakhstan, where they had become a minority group during the Soviet period (Oka 2010: 5). Another purpose was to fill the loss of population caused by the emigration (Alekseenko 2010: 192). As mentioned above, the independence of Kazakhstan from the Soviet Union caused mainly two kinds of migration: emigration of Russians, Ukrainians, and Germans from Kazakhstan and immigration of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan from abroad. Because of these migrations, the ethnic composition of the population changed greatly. Although Kazakhs made up only 39.7% of the population in 1989, they increased their share of the population to 63.1% in 2009 (Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2010: 10), and to 66.0% in January, 2015 (Qazaqstan Respublikası Ülttiq ekonomika ministerligi Statistika komiteti 2015: 2).

According to official data from the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development

of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 952,882 Kazakhs migrated to Kazakhstan from abroad between 1991 and January 1, 2015. Among them, 61.5% came from Uzbekistan, 14.3% from China, 9.3% from Mongolia, 6.8% from Turkmenistan, 4.6% from Russia, and 3.5% from the other countries<sup>10</sup>. Although the greatest share of returnees has come from Uzbekistan, at the beginning of the 1990s Kazakhs in Mongolia seemed to respond most enthusiastically to the return policies. They mainly migrated to provinces in northeastern Kazakhstan, after much of the Slavic population in the area left to return to Russia. Generally, returnees tend to live in the region close to the country where they are from: Kazakhs from China mainly live in the southeastern region, Kazakhs from Uzbekistan in the southern region, and Kazakhs from Mongolia in the northeastern region, including the Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province.

According to a survey conducted by the regional government in 2010, 1,258 returnees (261 households) live in the Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province. Almost all of them came from Mongolia. Only 5 individuals (1 household) were from Uzbekistan. Although I met with some Kazakhs from China during fieldwork in 2014, their number appears to be low. The majority of returnees in the Bayanaul region migrated to Kazakhstan between 1991 and 2007, with most arriving in the 1990s, particularly in 1992. Of all returnees in the region, 73.4% live in the small city of Maykayn and 26.6% live in the regional center, Bayanaul Village, and its neighboring village districts. In Bayanaul Village and the neighboring village districts, returnees live mixed with local Kazakhs. It is difficult to distinguish at first glance who is a returnee and who is a local Kazakh. Of individuals in returnee households, 88% are first generation who themselves migrated beyond national borders and 22% are second generation who were born in Kazakhstan after the migration.

### **3.2 Motivation for Kazakhs abroad to “return” to Kazakhstan**

The first returnees at the beginning of the 1990s, right after the independence of Kazakhstan, were eager to participate in the nation-building of the Kazakh people. For example, one Kazakh man from China, living in Almaty, stated that he decided to migrate to Kazakhstan because he thinks that his descendants will be able to continue speaking the Kazakh language and maintain Islamic practices.

Kazakhs from Mongolia, living in the Bayanaul region, stated similar motivations. A Kazakh woman from Mongolia, K. J., who was born in 1932 in Tolba *soum* (district) in Bayan-Ölgii Province, worked as a teacher of Russian language in Mongolia, and migrated to Kazakhstan in 1992. She reported that her husband, who was a writer, made the decision to migrate to Kazakhstan and wrote a poem about the experience, a part of which was as follows: “Forgive me my Mongolia, my birth and growing place. I am, as a man, drawn by blood and will go (to Kazakhstan).” This poem shows the man’s complex feeling for both Mongolia and Kazakhstan. After he migrated to Kazakhstan and died there in 1994, this stanza of the poem was written on his gravestone.

His elder brother’s son, M. T., who was born in 1961 in the same Tolba *soum* in Bayan-Ölgii Province and graduated from the Agricultural University in Ulaanbaatar, visited him in Kazakhstan, and was told that “whether you like or not, you will come

here (Kazakhstan).” It was a period of transition from socialist regimes and the situation was confusing in both Mongolia and Kazakhstan. Under such circumstances, M. T. decided to migrate to Kazakhstan in 1993 in order to make full use of his specialty as an agronomist.

The younger generation of Kazakhs in Mongolia migrated to Kazakhstan because their parents had decided to migrate. M. Z., who was born in 1973 in Ölgii City of Bayan-Ölgii Province and studied at the Medical Institute in Ulaanbaatar, migrated to Kazakhstan with his parents and siblings in 1992, and transferred to Semey Medical Institute in Kazakhstan. In his childhood, he was often told about the Altai region where his ancestors lived, and how they migrated to China and later to Mongolia. However, he knew little about Kazakhstan. He remembered that the elderly people were anxious about younger relatives, who began to forget their own language, religion, and customs living abroad, and therefore wanted to migrate to their own land, Kazakhstan. Indeed, another Kazakh man, who was born in 1949, said, “We came to Kazakhstan in order to bring our children to their own people in our ancestral land.”

Another motivation often stated by returnees is that their relatives live in Kazakhstan. The migration of one family is followed by other kinsmen’s families, because the network based on kinship is important for daily life among Kazakhs. Economic factors also should not be overlooked, especially for Kazakhs from Uzbekistan,



**Photo 5** A returnee who migrated to Kazakhstan from Mongolia. Bayanauil region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2014. He wore his leather belt with silver called “*Kerey belbeui*” (belt of the *Kerey* clan), which he brought from western Mongolia when he migrated to Kazakhstan.

where the average income is lower than in Kazakhstan. However, as the statements above show, it is difficult to say that economic reasons are the most significant for Kazakhs in Mongolia and China, who migrated to Kazakhstan in 1990. The Kazakhs in Mongolia experienced the economic disorder caused by the rapid democratization process around 1990, a few years prior to the economic transition in Kazakhstan, but the economic situation was severe in both countries in the 1990s. The reason why some Kazakhs in Mongolia decided to migrate to Kazakhstan seems likely to be related to their status as a minority group. The Kazakhs in Mongolia were not discriminated against by the majority, as returnees themselves stated, but experienced some difficulties as a minority. For example, they are able to acquire an education in the Kazakh language in primary and secondary schools, but cannot do so at the university level. Islamic practices are not restricted by the government, but the majority in Mongolia is Buddhist. Under these circumstances, some Kazakhs continued to live in Mongolia and others decided to migrate to Kazakhstan<sup>11</sup>).

### 3.3 The reception of returnees in Kazakhstan

How did the government of Kazakhstan and local Kazakhs receive these Kazakhs from abroad? A former deputy director of the Bayanaul region, B. S., was working as a *sovkhov* (state farm) director when the first returnees came to the region. He recalled the following:

The returnees first came to Kazakhstan from Bayan-Ölgii in Mongolia in 1991. Each province and each region began to accept them. The *sovkhov* (where I worked as a director) accepted ten families. They built their yurts to live. Housing was the most difficult problem. We organized jobs for them in the village, as well as on the *ferma* (small divisions of the *sovkhov*, where herders live and work). Previously, herders had left for the cities to work as coal miners, and very few people stayed to raise livestock on the *sovkhov*. The returnees from Mongolia were very good at breeding sheep, so we organized them to herd the *sovkhov*'s livestock. The government provided them one cow, ten sheep, money, and a house. After a few years, some of them left the *sovkhov* and moved to another province. The government did not support them if they decided to move to other places in Kazakhstan. Their work developed in a short time, and they mixed with the local Kazakhs. Leaving one's birth place is not easy. Their purpose is to bring the descendants to the homeland and to raise their children in the Kazakh way. It was quite a brave act. (Interview with B. S., a former *sovkhov* director in the Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, in 2013)

This statement shows that the returnees were accepted as laborers. Technically, returnees' legal status was originally as laborers, when they first came to Kazakhstan at the start of the 1990s<sup>12</sup>). A special immigrant quota was established only in 1993 (Oka 2010: 11). Although this former state farm director praises their “brave act,” the reality was harsher. One of the reasons for this was the mismatch between the desires of the returnees and the reception system in Kazakhstan.

The following comments are from a returnee who was born in Tsengel Village of Bayan-Ölgii Province in Mongolia and worked as a school teacher. His experience migrating to Kazakhstan in 1992 clearly shows the mismatch.

When we came to Kazakhstan, they accepted us as laborers, but we were educated people. I'll tell you one event that happened at that time. The directors of state farms went to Pavlodar City to greet their laborers. When they saw the people come, they said "Don't show them laborers' clothes, it will be a public shame," and they quickly hid the prepared clothes because the people were wearing suits and ties... I'll also tell you another event. A state farm director gave a returnee's family sheep to breed. The next day, neighbors wondered why the sheep had not been put to pasture. They went to the house and found a note saying: "We've gone to S City. So we are returning the sheep to you." Of course, they could not breed sheep because they were engineers. (Interview with S. K., a returnee from Mongolia, in 2014)

The returnees included many educated people<sup>13)</sup> and professionals such as engineers, teachers, and the like. The standard acceptance of all returnees as laborers was thus misleading of the characteristics of these migrants. S. K. himself first came as a laborer, and then five years later gained Kazakhstani citizenship and later found work as a teacher of mathematics.

The next case is another Kazakh man, M. T., who was born in 1961 in Mongolia and migrated to Kazakhstan in 1992, as mentioned in the previous subsection. He explains how he received a job suitable for his specialty after his migration.

I was given a position in a *sovkhos* at first. I worked in a storehouse and in a garage of the *sovkhos*. I gradually appealed to them that I was a specialist in agriculture, and they employed me as an accountant in the agricultural section of the *sovkhos* in 1994. It was a transition period from the socialist economy to a capitalistic market economy. But, people could not understand it. We had experienced the capitalistic market economy in Mongolia a few years earlier. When I saw people not being bothered by gasoline spilled to the ground, I said to them, "How wasteful to let the gasoline spill to the ground! You'll regret that later." Only later did people (in Kazakhstan) understand me...

When the *sovkhos* dissolved in 1998, I received six cattle from the *sovkhos* instead of two month's salary and moved to the regional center, Bayanaul Village. I was unemployed from 1998 to 2001. I raised vegetables in my garden to sell. My mother and little children helped me to grow cucumber, tomato, and so on. I also worked as a buyer and seller of cars. After the dissolution of the *sovkhos*, many cars and technical devices became unnecessary in Kazakhstan but were needed in Mongolia. I transported cars from Kazakhstan to Mongolia to sell. Only returnees could engage in this work. However, I couldn't get much profit from this work. You know, a man must work within his own specialty. In 2001, the government (of Kazakhstan) gave an examination to employ people of ability. I passed the examination and began to work in the village economic section in the regional office. (Interview with M. T., a returnee from Mongolia, in 2013)



As pointed out in this interview, the state farms that accepted returnees in the early 1990s were dissolved in the second half of 1990s. This caused much difficulty for the returnees, who tried to do various jobs to get by. Some of them, like M. T., were accepted as specialists necessary for local society.

According to a survey conducted by the Bayanaul regional office in 2010, out of 185 adult returnees who migrated from Mongolia and lived in Bayanaul Village and neighboring villages, there were 50 self-employed individuals, 24 teachers (including 2 school directors), 11 persons working at various jobs at public institutions, 6 businessmen, 4 drivers, 4 doctors, 3 construction workers, 3 governmental officials, 3 coal miners, 30 pensioners, and 24 students. Thus, returnees now engaged in a similar range of jobs as local Kazakhs in this region<sup>14</sup>).

#### 4. Remaking Connectedness after the Migration to Kazakhstan

##### 4.1 The gap between local Kazakhs and returnees

However, returnees were often differentiated from local Kazakhs and sometimes discriminated against. A returnee, M. Z. stated, “Once I was told why the government (of Kazakhstan) went to the trouble of accepting Kazakhs from abroad in a period of such difficulty. It meant that the situation was severe for local Kazakhs and much more severe for returnees. But, we experienced the hard period together and the situation has become much better.” This statement shows that returnees had difficulty in living and remaking connectedness with local Kazakhs.

The gap between local Kazakhs and returnees was not only related to employment, but also to language and customs. On the one hand, returnees were disappointed by the fact that Kazakhs in Kazakhstan often speak in Russian and some of them are not proficient in the Kazakh language. An elderly returnee, K. J., told me that she was very angry when she migrated to Kazakhstan because Kazakhs in Kazakhstan often speak in Russian to each other. Some returnees had difficulty even buying products in stores because salespersons, including both Russians and Kazakhs, speak only in Russian.

The local Kazakhs, on the other hand, were surprised at some customs of the returnees. A Kazakh woman in her forties who lived in a village told me about a returnee family that lived as neighbors on one division of the *sovkhos* for pasturing livestock. She stated,

We were surprised that they made tea in a pot, not using a *samovar* (Russian water heater), and they put salt in it. But, maybe, our ancestors also used a pot to make tea until they learned about the *samovar* from Russians. Moreover, returnees brought their yurts to live in. Although we suggested that they live in a house, they disagreed [in summer]. When winter came, they at last agreed to enter the house because the wind was so strong and cold here (in northern Kazakhstan). (Interview with G. T., a villager in Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, in 2011)

Kazakhs in Mongolia and China have used yurts up to the present day. For instance,

among Kazakhs in Bayan-Ölgii Province of western Mongolia, not only herders, but others as well, use yurts as a dwelling in the summer. Therefore, most Kazakhs from Mongolia brought their yurts to Kazakhstan when they migrated.

Although returnees do not use yurts now because of the severe and windy climate in northern Kazakhstan, they invariably use them on special occasions (Photos 6, 7). One returnee stated, “Because of the windy climate here, we don’t use yurts. So the old things we used in them have become worm-eaten. We kept some of these things as mementos and threw the others away. Now we use yurts only at *toy* (celebrations, weddings in particular). We erected it in our garden for one week, so that guests could live there.” Actually, I observed part of a wedding of returnees in Bayanal Village in the summer of 2013. Both the bride and groom sides were returnees from Mongolia. The bride’s side erected a yurt near their house. Although it was a windy and cold day, they warmly received the groom’s parents and kinsmen, not in their house, but in their yurt, which was beautifully decorated with handicrafts, some of which were typical for returnees, but were quite different from those of local Kazakhs.

The Islamic practices of returnees from Mongolia (and China) are also different in some points from the local Kazakhs in the Bayanauil region. For example, memorial rituals, including the Quran recitation for the deceased, are important Islamic practices for both returnees and local Kazakhs, but the ritual is referred to in different ways: usually called *nawkhan* (literally meaning an event many people hold together) by Kazakhs from Mongolia and *dūgha* (literally meaning prayer) by local Kazakhs in the Bayanauil region. Both returnees and local Kazakhs prepare ritual fried bread called *shelpek* for Islamic feasts and for memorial rituals, but the shape of the bread is different (Photos 8, 9). The returnees were likely to be unfamiliar with the large memorial feasts, called *as*, that were revived by local Kazakhs. Moreover, Kazakhs in Mongolia usually do not visit the sacred places associated with Islamic saints (*āulie*) like Kazakhs in Kazakhstan<sup>15</sup>). These differences come not only from the fact that they had lived in different countries, but the fact that most Kazakhs in Mongolia and China belong to the *Kerey* clan, in comparison with the Kazakhs in the Bayanauil region of Pavlodar Province in Kazakhstan belong to the *Arghin* clan.

Thus, the returnees were set apart because most could not speak Russian like local Kazakhs; many still lived in nomadic tents as summer houses, which was no longer common practice in Kazakhstan; and they differed in some features of Islamic practices, among other particularities in their way of life compared with local Kazaks. The fact that the returnees often married other returnees, not local Kazakhs, strengthened the invisible border at the beginning of the migration period, although some young returnees now marry local Kazakhs with whom they studied or worked together.

Twenty years have now passed since the first migration of Kazakhs from abroad, and the evaluation of them by local Kazakhs has gradually changed. One 40 year-old local Kazak woman told me the following:

When they came [to Kazakhstan] their cultural level was low. However, they are very diligent. Their children have talent for composition in the Kazakh language, singing, and



**Photo 6** The yurts of returnees who migrated to Kazakhstan from China. Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2014.



**Photo 7** The wedding celebration of returnees who migrated from Mongolia. Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2013.



**Photo 8** Ritual fried bread *shelpek* made by returnees from Mongolia. Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2013.



**Photo 9** Ritual fried bread *shelpek* (with a meat dish) made by local Kazakhs. Bayanaul region, Kazakhstan, 2013.

playing musical instruments. In my opinion, they are excellent because they lived as a minority in Mongolia and necessarily think about showing their talent to the majority. We [local Kazakhs in Kazakhstan] are just proud that we are wealthy and don't want to work hard. We are lazy. (Interview with M. K., a villager in the Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, in 2014)

These statements show an ambivalent evaluation of the returnees by local Kazakhs. The perception that they are less modernized and that they are traditional are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, returnees are often referred to as people who “have kept the tradition”

(“*dästürdi saqtaghan*”). Here, *dästür* (tradition) in the Kazakh language means the customs that have been kept from generation to generation. In other words, continuity is a core component of the concept of *dästür*, which began to be discussed often in the post-socialist period. It is also sometimes said that the returnees are eager to “keep their beliefs” (“*dindi ūstaydı*”). *Din* in the Kazakh language means belief and/or religion, particularly Islam. Thus, this statement refers to the eagerness among some of the returnees to maintain Islamic practices as a part of their tradition<sup>16</sup>.

The next question is how the returnees remake connectedness with local Kazakhs, even with the invisible border that exists between them.

#### 4.2 Returnees’ involvement in the revitalization of Islam

One way that returnees constructed a relationship with local Kazakhs is through Islamic practices. When Islam was revitalized as part of Kazakh tradition in the 1990s and 2000s, some returnees played a specific role in this process (Fujimoto 2015). Khalifa Altay might be the most famous returnee in the sphere of Islam in Kazakhstan. He was born in the Altai region (currently Mongolia) in 1917 and left the region in the 1930s to go to Tibet, then to India, and finally to Turkey in the 1950s (Matsubara 2011: 26, 88; Mamshev 2012: 314). He was a member of the small Kazakh group that migrated to Turkey from China, as mentioned in the previous section. After many years in Turkey, he visited Mongolia in 1990 and conducted the first Friday prayer after the democratization of Mongolia. In the same year, the Kazakh-language commentary on the Quran (Kazakh-language Quran) which he translated was published by the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Kazakhstan with the financial support of Saudi Arabia. He participated in the first *Qūriltay* meeting of the World Association of Kazakhs, migrated to Kazakhstan in 1993, and died in Kazakhstan in 2003. This case provides an example of a Kazakh who had lived in non-socialist country and played an important role in revitalizing Islam in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

Kazakhs from socialist and post-socialist countries, on the contrary, seem less likely to have played such a role in revitalizing Islam. However, some Kazakhs from China and Mongolia did make efforts to do so in the 1990s. One Kazakh who migrated to Kazakhstan from China stated: “Although Kazakhs in China experienced the anti-religious campaigns of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, they were able to gradually revitalize Islamic practices in the 1980s because elderly people who knew the Islamic practices prior to the Cultural Revolution still remembered them and were able to pass them on.” According to interview data, some of these elders migrated to Kazakhstan, where religious restrictions were imposed much earlier in the 1930s, and became the first imams in newly opened mosques in the post-Soviet period.

Kazakhs from Mongolia sometimes also played important roles in revitalizing Islamic practices, even though they also were subjected to severe anti-religious campaigns in the 1930s, a few years later than in the Soviet Union. For example, an elderly Kazakh man from Mongolia became the first imam in the newly opened mosque in Sarsenbayev village district<sup>17</sup> in the Bayanaul region (Photo 10). The villagers remember him as an educated and respected person, who knew the Quran well and could recite it in Arabic.





**Photo 10** A mosque in Qarajar Village, at the center of Sarsenbayev village district, Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2013. A returnee from Mongolia became the first imam of this mosque.

After serving as an imam for a few years, he migrated to a small town in Pavlodar Province, where he died in 2003. Therefore, I was not able to conduct an interview with him during my long-term field research during 2003–2005. However, I found his daughter living in the regional center, Bayanaul Village, in 2014. According to his youngest daughter, his life can be summarized as follows:

He was born in 1927 in Borghin of Mongolia near the border with China, and learned from a *molda* (mullah, an intellectual who knows Islam well) until he was 13 years old. However, he could not keep his belief in Islam under the socialist regime and even joined the Communist Party. After his retirement around 1987–88, he began to recite daily prayers again. He migrated to Kazakhstan with his family in 1992 because he hoped his descendants would keep their language and their religion, Islam. He made efforts to open a mosque in Sarsenbayev village district, and the villagers voluntarily remade a *sovkhos* building into a mosque. (Interview with a daughter of imam, who was a returnee from Mongolia, 2014)

Thus, some elderly Kazakhs from abroad, who had acquired an Islamic education before the severe anti-religious campaign during the socialist period, also were able to play an important role in the revitalization of Islam in Kazakhstan. Their Islamic knowledge was respected not only by returnees, but also by local Kazakhs.

These elderly imams and mullahs among returnees gradually retired and passed on their authority to the younger generation who learned in the Islamic institutes, which were opened in Kazakhstan in the 1990s and 2000s. In other words, the special role of returnees in revitalizing Islam seems likely to have passed. Actually, in 2011, a Kazak



**Photo 11** The mosque in the Bayanaul Village, Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2014. Some young returnees from Mongolia and China work at mosques in the region.

working in QMDB said that the returnees did not play a particularly important role in the revitalization of Islam and that they just came to the mosques. However, when I visited the regional mosque in Bayanaul Village in 2014, I saw that a few young returnees came to the mosque and enthusiastically talked about Islam with the head imam, a local Kazakh (Photo 11). Why did they gather at the mosque, and how did they try to make connectedness among themselves and with local Kazakhs?

It is noteworthy that some young returnees, who are interested in Islam, get acquainted with each other and strengthen their connectedness. S. T., a young Kazakh man from China, was born in the Altai region of Xinjiang Autonomous Region in China in 1988 and migrated to Kazakhstan in 2004. After learning in a mosque in Eastern Kazakhstan Province, he studied in a madrasa in Shymkent City of Southern-Kazakhstan province for three years from 2007 to 2010. After graduation, he became an imam in a city in Eastern Kazakhstan Province. He came to the Bayanaul region because his classmate in the madrasa, B. T., who is also a returnee, invited him there.

B. T. was born in Mongolia in 1985, migrated to Kazakhstan in 2008, and gained Kazakhstan citizenship in 2010. After graduating from a madrasa in Shymkent, he began to work in a city in Northern Kazakhstan Province. However, he had difficulty teaching Islam to Kazakhs there because they primarily spoke Russian, whereas he spoke mostly Kazakh and was not as good at Russian as many other returnees. He asked to leave and go to a more rural region where more people spoke in the Kazakh language. Thus, he came to Bayanaul region in Pavlodar Province.

Another young Kazakh man, X. S., from the Altai region of China, was born in 1989, migrated to Kazakhstan in 2006, and studied at a madrasa in Pavlodar City, from which he graduated as the best student in his year. After working in the capital city of Astana, he returned to Pavlodar Province, where his family lived, and became the imam in a village of Bayanaul region. The fact that B. T. and X. S. are from China and S. T. is from Mongolia does not separate them, but connects them. X. S. explained that “Kazakhs in China and Mongolia speak the same dialect. They believe in Islam in the right way. They follow Islam and tradition.” This statement also shows that the returnees insist they keep the more “right” way of Islam than local Kazakhs.

The discussion about the “right way of Islam” came into focus when some Kazakhs began to study in Islamic institutes. Both local Kazakhs and returnees of the younger generation, who had studied Islam at Islamic institutes and who work in mosques, criticized some customs such as saint veneration. When I visited the mosque in Bayanaul Village, the head imam, who is a local Kazakh, talked with young returnees about a sacred place called *Qongir äulie*, which is located in the Bayanaul region. According to local beliefs, *Qongir äulie* is a cave in which the saint *Qongir äulie* once lived. The local Kazakh imam and the young returnees criticized pilgrimages to *Qongir äulie*. They insist that customs such as visiting the shrines of saints or sacred places and asking the spirits of the deceased to protect their descendants are incorrect according to Islamic dogma. According to their interpretation, only Allah, not saints or ancestral spirits, can decide the destiny of people. Saint veneration is common in Kazakhstan, but is not common in Kazakh society in Mongolia. Therefore, Kazakhs from Mongolia sometimes insist that they keep Islam better than Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. Although it is unclear whether the activities of these young returnees will be accepted by most Kazakhs (both returnees and the local Kazakhs), mosques offer a way for some young Kazakhs from abroad to make connectedness with local Kazakhs who are interested in their shared religion.

Moreover, the memorial ritual provides another way for returnees to cooperate with local Kazakhs, despite the fact that some differences exist between the returnees and local Kazakhs in regards to this practice. In 2003, I observed that returnees rent their yurts to local Kazakhs for large memorial feasts called *as*, which Kazakhs in Kazakhstan revived in the post-Soviet period, although Kazakhs in Mongolia were likely to be unfamiliar with this practice. I also heard that Kazakhs in Mongolia recently have begun to hold large memorial feasts, influenced by the Kazakhs’ large memorial feasts in Kazakhstan. Thus, the returnees and local Kazakhs cooperate in holding large memorial feasts, which was revived in the post-socialist period.

To sum up, the mosque, on the one hand, offers a way for some Kazakhs from abroad to make connectedness with local Kazakhs who are interested in their shared religion. On the other hand, the memorial ritual offers a way for returnees to cooperate with local Kazakhs. The process of remaking connectedness through Islamic practices has gradually progressed, although the generational gap between elderly people and young people studying in Islamic institutes exists among both returnees and local Kazakhs.

### 4.3 Remaking connectedness through reviving the *Nawrız* festival

Another way of making and remaking connectedness between returnees and local Kazakhs is through the *Nawrız* festival. *Nawrız* is a traditional New Year festival in Central Asia, rooted in the ancient Persian New Year, which is held at the vernal spring equinox. For Kazakhs, it was a festival at the beginning of the milking season. They went to the steppe to play various games and prepared a special kind of porridge called *nawrız köje* for this celebration in the pre-Soviet period. In the socialist period, however, it was not permitted to officially celebrate *Nawrız* in Central Asian countries or in Kazakh society in Mongolia. It was celebrated only in rural areas on a small scale in each household or neighborhood. The extent to which people continued to celebrate *Nawrız* at home differed depending on the region. In northern Kazakhstan only a few families continued to prepare *nawrız köje* at home<sup>18</sup>, while in western Mongolia, people continued to invite each other for *nawrız köje* at home.

During the last years of the socialist era, or in some cases after the independence of the Central Asian countries of the Soviet Union, the government of each republic began to celebrate *Nawrız* as a national holiday. In Kazakhstan, *Nawrız* was officially celebrated in 1989 as a large festival in the capital city. After that, *Nawrız* began to be officially celebrated in each province and each region. For example, in the Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province, people started to hold the festival around 1990 with official approval. I observed the *Nawrız* festival in the Bayanaul region in 2005. In the center of the region, Bayanaul Village, many yurts were built on the main street near the regional office. People dressed in Kazakh costumes, and the special porridge *nawrız köje* and a meat dish called *beshbarmaq* were served inside yurts. A concert was held in the Regional Cultural Center and a horse race was held on the steppe outside Bayanaul Village. However, from 2003 to 2005, only a few households prepared *nawrız köje* at home. The number of people preparing *nawrız köje* at home gradually increased up until 2015, but villagers do not usually invite each other for *nawrız köje*.

In Mongolia, *Nawrız* also began to be celebrated by local officials in Bayan-Ölgii Province, although it was not listed as an official holiday. Since the 1990s the Bayan-Ölgii provincial office has also organized a *Nawrız* festival in the central square, as well as at the theater and in the other public spaces. A festival was even held in the central square in Ulaanbaatar in 2014, but the essential practice of *Nawrız* is considered to be visiting each other to celebrate and to eat *nawrız köje* together. I observed Kazakhs in Bayan-Ölgii Province in western Mongolia celebrating *Nawrız* in their homes in 2013. It is held as a time to visit elders and greet guests. Each household prepared a meat-based meal and *nawrız köje* for guests who arrived from the early morning. People visited each other over the course of several days.

It is noteworthy that the Kazakhs who migrated to Kazakhstan from Mongolia mutually invite their relatives (most of whom are also from Mongolia) to their home for *nawrız köje*. It is a way they strengthen their connectedness with each other. Some returnees were critical that so few local Kazakhs in the Bayanaul region of northern Kazakhstan prepare *nawrız köje* in their own households:

In Bayan-Ölgii region [in Mongolia], people prepare *nawrız köje* at home. Here [in the Bayanaul region of Kazakhstan], only official organizations like schools and offices prepare *nawrız köje*. I frankly said [to the local Kazakhs] that they should prepare *nawrız köje* at home to celebrate *Nawrız*. You can visit 30 households to celebrate *Nawrız* and eat *nawrız köje* before you go to your workplace. If you greet them and eat one spoon in each household, you will be satisfied. We, 30 households of returnees, visit 5–6 households each day to celebrate *Nawrız*. We greet each other by saying “*Ülisting üli küni qıttı bolsın! Aq mol bolsın!*” (“Congratulation on the great day of our people! I hope that the milk and milk products will be rich!”). Here [in the Bayanaul region of Kazakhstan] it is held as an official festival, and [local Kazakhs] have not reached the level of celebrating it in each household. (Interview with M. T., a returnee from Mongolia, in 2013)

Indeed, I observed that a returnee family invited the relatives for *nawrız köje* at home (Photos 12, 13, 14). *Nawrız köje* is made of rice, grains, yogurt, meat, and bouillon and is served hot. The returnees remarked, “It is strange that the local Kazakhs in the Bayanaul region added raisins and served it cool.” Besides the *nawrız köje*, the returnees also prepared fried bread and a meat dish with pasta. I noticed that the meat was prepared in the Kazakh style, but the pasta was made the Mongolian way. Through mutual visitation and celebration with food at *Nawrız* the returnees strengthened their connectedness after the migration.



**Photo 12** A returnee woman from Mongolia preparing *nawrız köje* (special porridge for the *Nawrız* festival). Bayanaul region, Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2015.





**Photo 13** Returnees serving *nawrız köje* to their relatives at home. Bayanaul region, Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2015.



**Photo 14** Returnees celebrating *Nawrız* at home with *nawrız köje* and a meat dish. Bayanaul region, Pavlodar Province, Kazakhstan, 2015.

Furthermore, the returnees have made connectedness with local Kazakhs through offering their yurts for official *Nawrız* festivals. The yurt became an essential element for the revitalized *Nawrız* festival among Kazakhs in the post-socialist period, both in Kazakhstan and Mongolia, because *Nawrız* is considered as an occasion to show the traditional lifestyle of Kazakhs. Therefore, the regional offices both in Kazakhstan and in western Mongolia prepare yurts for the festival. It is not so difficult for Kazakhs in western Mongolia to find yurts because they use them as a summer dwelling even up to the present day. However, preparing yurts is sometime difficult for Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, where people do not use yurts in their daily lives. Because of this, the regional office of Bayanaul called upon returnees from Mongolia to offer their yurts for the *Nawrız* festival (Photo 15). In 2005, half of the yurts built on the main street belonged to returnees. A returnee from Mongolia told me,

A yurt is so spacious that 50–60 people, even 100 people can be received there. In my yurt nothing is ready-made. All things are handmade; you see *alasha* (wool carpet), *basqır* (wool cloth as ornaments in yurts), *bau* (wool belt for yurts)..... They [local Kazakhs] take old things from us and decorate the yurts [for the festival]. (Interview with S. K., a returnee from Mongolia, in 2013)

This statement shows the returnees' self-confidence that they hold with tradition and at local Kazakhs borrowing the old handicrafts from them to celebrate the festival. Indeed, returnees' yurts are often borrowed by local Kazakhs for festivals. During the *Nawrız* festival, the yurts were decorated using handmade wool cloth, embroideries, patchworks, and a single wooden chest of drawers called a *sandıq*.



**Photo 15** *Nawrız* festival in the Bayanaul region, Kazakhstan, 2015. Local Kazakhs using the returnees' yurt.

It is also noteworthy that the regional office in Bayanaul bought some yurts from Kazakhs in Uzbekistan for schools because there were not sufficient yurts in northern Kazakhstan. I observed how these yurts were used when the *Nawriz* festival was celebrated at schools on March 20–21, 2015. Although a regional official said to me that the yurts of returnees were not necessary because they now have their own yurts brought from Uzbekistan, I observed that some of the yurts used by the official organization of the region, which were erected in the main street in front of regional office on 22 March,



**Photo 16** *Nawriz* festival in the Bayanaul region, Kazakhstan, 2015. People watching a concert in front of yurts erected in the main street.



**Photo 17** A returnee’s yurt used at the *Nawriz* festival in the Bayanaul region, Kazakhstan, 2015. The cover of the yurt was decorated with Kazakh ornament appliqué; the door has Mongolian ornamentation.

were borrowed from returnees from Mongolia (Photos 16, 17). Thus, yurts from Kazakhs abroad and returnees played an important role in the festival in northern Kazakhstan.

Under these circumstances, the returnees insist that they have maintained traditions for celebrating *Nawrız* that local Kazakhs in northern Kazakhstan had forgotten under the Soviet regime when close contact with Russians and the other Russian-speaking ethnic groups occurred. Although some traditions of the returnees from Mongolia (most of whom are *Kerey*), such as the shape of yurts and the tapestries in it, differ from those of local Kazakhs in the Bayanauıl region of northern Kazakhstan (most of whom are *Arghın*), local Kazakhs in the Bayanauıl region agree with the returnee's statement that returnees from Mongolia have kept with tradition and consider their yurts as being necessary for the *Nawrız* festival. The returnees, who had stood apart by using yurts as dwellings, changed the perception of using yurts from negative to positive; from backwardness to an expression of tradition.

To sum up, returnees try to promote their social status and remake connectedness with local Kazakhs by stressing that they have kept Kazakh traditions alive, such as the use of yurts and the celebration of *Nawrız* at home with *nawrız köje*. Local Kazakhs in northern Kazakhstan have begun to value these traditions in the post-Soviet period and recognize that the returnees have kept with tradition better than they have. Yurts decorated with handicrafts that displayed regional character, began to be regarded as a common tradition for all Kazakhs, including returnees and local Kazakhs. Thus, the connectedness between returnees and local Kazakhs was gradually remade through the *Nawrız* festival.

## 5. Conclusion

Migration across national borders occurred on a large scale because of the rise of ethno-nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kazakhs migrated to Kazakhstan from abroad according to the governmental policy of Kazakhstan, which defined Kazakhstan as the "historical homeland." Thus, the migration of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan from abroad was characterized as a return migration. However, the connectedness in the ethnic group of Kazakhs who had lived beyond the national border did not work as the government of Kazakhstan had intended. The returnees faced a mismatch between their education and training and available jobs, difficulty in using Russian, and differences in their way of life.

The gap between local Kazakhs and returnees become clear after the migration. The different experience of modernization in the socialist countries, including the process of sedentarization, resulted in the differentiation of the Kazakhs in each location. The most remarkable difference was that yurts were used by returnees, which was viewed as backward by local Kazakhs immediately after the migration.

Furthermore, the differences came not only from the fact that they had lived separately for seventy years in different states, but also from the fact that they each belonged to different patrilineal clans. Some regional characteristics related to patrilineal clans exist in Kazakh society, and these subtle differences created another type of border

between the returnees and local Kazakhs. The “returnees” did not literally “return” to the ancestral land where their forefather actually lived. When they “returned” to their “historical homeland,” they actually migrated to a land that had mostly been occupied by another clan.

Under these circumstances, the connectedness between returnees and local Kazakhs was not automatically constructed. Rather, the returnees were differentiated from the local Kazakhs and sometimes were discriminated against. The returnees themselves sometimes criticized local Kazakhs because they were disappointed at the fact that some Kazakhs in Kazakhstan did not all speak in Kazakh and had not kept some traditions. In order to live in Kazakhstan, the returnees had to remake connectedness both among themselves and with local Kazakhs. In an area such as the Bayanauil region, where returnees live mixed together with local Kazakhs, the remaking of connectedness with local Kazakh neighbors was essential to live.

Returnees remade connectedness with local Kazakhs by emphasizing their role in maintaining traditions to a greater degree than Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, although the tradition of returnees and those of local Kazakhs differ in some ways. Some elderly returnees stressed their piety and knowledge of Islam. Because of these activities, the returnees gained respect from local Kazakhs. Recently, some young returnees who work in mosques, insisted that they have kept “the right way” of Islam. Although it is not clear whether these young returnees will remake the connectedness with most local Kazakhs, the mosque provides a way for them to cooperate with local Kazakhs who are interested in their religion. The revived large memorial feasts, which are sometimes celebrated in yurts, also offer another way for returnees to cooperate with local Kazakhs. Thus, the remaking connectedness through Islamic practices has progressed, to some extent.

A more successful way for remaking connectedness has been the involvement of returnees in the revived festival *Nawrız*. The returnees not only strengthened the connectedness among themselves through mutual invitations to visit and eat the special food *nawrız köje* at home, but also showed their traditions, such as handicrafts and yurts, to local Kazakhs during *Nawrız*. Yurts were especially important because they are difficult for local Kazakhs to obtain since they had not been used as dwellings in northern Kazakhstan. In other words, returnees show local Kazakhs the importance of their tradition through the *Nawrız* festival. Customs such as using yurts with handmade crafts are often considered as being backwards, but at the same time, are considered as keeping with tradition. The returnees themselves worked to change the perception of backwardness into a positive trait as the holders of the tradition that Kazakhs in northern Kazakhstan had lost in the Soviet period.

The returnees’ insistence on tradition was accepted by most local Kazakhs, because local Kazakhs also began to reevaluate the continuity of their own tradition. In the Bayanauil region, local Kazakhs conducted small scale memorial rituals even in the Soviet period. Based on this continuity of tradition, they revitalized memorial rituals, and revived the large memorial feasts (Fujimoto 2011b). However, continuity of the celebration of *Nawrız* in the Soviet period in the Bayanauil region was much weaker than life-cycle rituals such as memorial rituals. Therefore, local Kazakhs began to introduce



some traditions of the returnees as common traditions for all Kazakhs in reviving the *Nawrız* festival. Thus, the regional society including both returnees and local Kazakhs was gradually reconstructed after the regime change.

The case of Kazakhs clearly shows that remaking connectedness is crucial not only after migration to a country where another ethnic group is the majority, but also after return migration to a country where one's own ethnic group is the majority. While return migration is caused by various reasons worldwide, generally, returnees tend to be invisible in society, as they belong to the majority ethnic group. However, as shown in this paper, in order to understand the dynamics of micro-regional society (regional society at the micro level), their attempts to remake connectedness have not been overlooked. Their involvement in the revitalization of religious practices and the festival have played important roles for remaking connectedness after their return migration after regime change.

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### Notes

- 1) Another example is return migration after war and/or the end of colonial rule, as detailed in the special issue "Rethinking Return Migration" in the *Japanese Journal of Cultural Anthropology* (Okawa 2016: 534).
- 2) Transcription of the Kazakh language is based on Komatsu *et al.* (2005: 592).
- 3) National Bureau of Statistics of China (Internet, December 5, 2014, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search/keywordlist2>).
- 4) National census of Soviet Union in 1989 (Internet, July 6, 2015, [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=4](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=4)).
- 5) Federal State Statistics services (Internet, July 6, 2015, [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf)).
- 6) The *Kerey* (*Kereit*) and *Arghın* were large clans in the *Orta Jüz* (Middle Horde). Some Kazakhs from the *Abaq Kerey*, a part of the *Kerey* clan, live in eastern Kazakhstan as well as in western Mongolia (Arghınbaev, Mūqanov, and Vostrov 2000: 194–215), but they are very few in Pavlodar Province, where the majority of Kazakhs belong to *Arghın* clan.
- 7) The exception is the "Ili affair" in 1962, when 60,000 people (mostly Kazakhs and Uighurs) illegally migrated beyond the national border to the territory of the Soviet Union (currently Kazakhstan) from the Ili Kazakh autonomous province of Xinjiang, China. After this affair, the Soviet Union and China addressed the situation and the national border between them was

- completely closed until 1983. See Mori (2005).
- 8) Harsh collectivization caused social confusion and starvation on the Kazakh steppe. Because of this, some Kazakhs fled to neighboring countries such as China.
  - 9) See Battulga (2007). Although falconry (hunting with eagles) is a tradition of Kazakhs both in Mongolia and Kazakhstan, this custom has developed to a greater degree in the mountainous region of Bayan-Ölgii in western Mongolia than in Kazakhstan. The paper of Altangul Bolat in this volume focuses on falconry.
  - 10) The official site of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Article was released on January 15, 2015 (Internet, December 1, 2015, <http://www.mzsr.gov.kz/node/320678>).
  - 11) The frequency that returnees visit Mongolia varies. M. T. (1961–) visited Mongolia two or three times per year when he worked as a car and equipment buyer in the early 2000s, but now he visits Mongolia only once every five or six years. A returnee from the younger generation, M. Z. (1973–) visited Mongolia three times over the last 20 years following his migration to Kazakhstan. He pointed out that elderly people visited Mongolia more often to meet their relatives on special occasions such as weddings and funerals. Indeed, when I interviewed S. K. (1949–), he said that he had visited Mongolia with his wife three days earlier. It is notable that returnees feel that Kazakh society is changing and that the differences between returnees and those who remain in Mongolia have become larger.
  - 12) On November 18, 1991, Kazakhstan passed the Resolution on the Procedures and Condition of the Relocation to Kazakh SSR for Person of Kazakh Ethnicity from Other Republics and Abroad Willing to Work in Rural Area aimed not only at regulating the immigration of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan, but also at developing Kazakh *aul* (village) and the agricultural industry complex, which was then facing a deep crisis (UNDP Kazakhstan 2006: 9).
  - 13) According to statistics on returnees in 2010 in Bayanaul region of Pavlodar Province in Kazakhstan, 23.4% graduated university, 10.8% graduated secondary specialized school, 60% graduated general secondary school, 2.7% finished only elementary school, 2.2% were illiterate, and 0.9 were unknown. These figures are from a sample of 185 adults who migrated from Mongolia and were living in Bayanaul Village and neighboring villages. The data were based on a survey conducted by the Bayanaul regional office.
  - 14) The condition of employment is relatively good in northern Kazakhstan, compared to southern Kazakhstan (Tatibekov 2010b: 200).
  - 15) The veneration of saints is especially popular in southern Kazakhstan, but sacred places also exist in northern Kazakhstan, including the Bayanaul region.
  - 16) Islam in Mongolia has developed in different ways than in Kazakhstan over the last twenty years (Fujimoto 2015: 147–158). Because of this, the Islamic practices of returnees have differentiated in some points from that of Kazakhs in Mongolia.
  - 17) The name of the village district has been altered to protect privacy.
  - 18) In the southern part of Kazakhstan, people continued to celebrate *Nawrız*.

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