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Map of Kazakhstan



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Chapter 1 Country Profile

Introduction

For much of its known history, present-day Kazakhstan was home to nomadic pastoral tribes who roamed its vast steppes (arid, grassland plains) according to seasonal migration patterns. The Kazakhs, for whom the region is named, emerged in the area in the 15th century. Of mixed Mongol and Turkic descent, they developed a sweeping nomadic empire based on a pastoral economy. Beginning in the 17th century, Russia gradually colonized the region, a process that resulted in the total annexation of Kazakh lands by the mid 19th century. During this time, large numbers of Russians and other ethnic groups began to settle in the region; these influxes continued into the 20th century. The corresponding introduction of sedentary agriculture and industry led to the deterioration of the Kazakhs' traditional nomadic pastoral lifestyle. This process culminated in the Soviet era, when communism and Russian culture shaped the development of an ethnically diverse, industrialized society.

Since gaining its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has grappled with the enduring legacies of Kazakh tribalism and Russian colonialism. Fashioning a new identity in which Kazakh, a language without a strong literary tradition, replaced Russian as the language of government has been a challenge. The country's political transformation from a Soviet republic to an independent, Kazakh-dominated state has highlighted ethnic



differences.¹ Kazakhstan remains home to more than 100 ethnicities of varied religious affiliation, some of whom were involuntarily resettled there during the Soviet era and even earlier. Yet many non-Kazakh ethnic groups, particularly Russians, have left the country in large numbers. This outmigration has occurred during the resurgence of Kazakh cultural identity and political power—the latter of which has been consolidated by Nursultan Nazarbayev, an ethnic Kazakh who has served as the country's president for the entire independent era. Under his leadership, the exploitation of the country's immense energy and mineral deposits has made Kazakhstan the richest nation in Central Asia.

Area

Kazakhstan is located in Central Asia, a geopolitically important region comprising five former Soviet republics. It shares borders with five countries: Russia (to the north), China (to the east), Kyrgyzstan (to the southeast), Uzbekistan (to the south), and Turkmenistan (to the far southwest). Kazakhstan's western border traces the shore of the Caspian Sea until it meets the nation's boundary with Russia in the northwest. A small portion of the country—the area west of the Ural River and north of the Caspian Sea—is located within Europe according to traditional geographic definitions. Overall, the country comprises 2,717,300 sq km (1,049,155 sq mi), making it the ninth largest nation in the world. By

¹ Slate. Hayden, Jessica. "Dispatch from Kazakhstan: Who am I? Russian identity in post-Soviet Kazakhstan." 20 July 2004. <http://www.slate.com/id/2103946/>

comparison, it is roughly four times the size of Texas. Its extensive land area and relatively small population—estimated at 15.4 million in July 2009—make it one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world.²

Geographical Regions and Features

Northern Steppes

Northern Kazakhstan consists primarily of steppe, or vast, mostly treeless grasslands. Much of the terrain is flat or undulating. The region's highpoints lie in the Kazakh Uplands, a large area of hills and low mountains that spread throughout the east-central region of the country. Patches of forest and woodlands mark the lowlands of the far north, while, moving south, the grasslands grow increasingly dry as they merge with the shrubby semi-deserts of south-central Kazakhstan. With large tracts of cropland and pasture, the steppes are the agricultural center of Kazakhstan. Strong winds are common. As a legacy of the colonial and Soviet eras, ethnic Russians and Ukrainians are predominant in the north.³



© /mrenko/wikipedia.org
Steppe in central Kazakhstan

Semi-Deserts and Deserts

Spanning most of central and southern Kazakhstan, semi-desert and desert terrain covers over two thirds of the nation's territory.⁴ From north to south, the ground cover of this region generally transitions from grasslands to shrublands, with scattered areas of barren desert and tracts of irrigated cropland or pasture around water sources.⁵ The terrain ranges from flat lowlands to rolling uplands, the latter of which include the southern reaches of the Kazakh Uplands in the east. In the southwest, between the Caspian and Aral Seas, the Ustyurt desert plateau spans the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan border. The region comprises several distinct deserts. In the west, the Greater Barsuki Desert lies north of the Aral Sea. The Kyzylkum Desert lies south of the Syr Darya River and extends into Uzbekistan. In the south-central region, the large Betpaqdala Desert lies west of Lake Balkhash. Finally, the Muyunkum Desert lies south of the Betpaqdala, on the southern side of the Chu River.⁶

The Caspian Depression

The Caspian Depression is a lowland area surrounding the northern half of the Caspian Sea; most of the region lies below sea level. Within Kazakhstan, the depression extends

² Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Kazakhstan." 30 July 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>

³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: The Land: Settlement Patterns." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "FAO Country Profiles: Kazakhstan: Geographic Description." 3 September 2007. <http://www.fao.org/forestry/18310/en/kaz/>

⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "FAO Country Profiles: Kazakhstan: Maps: Land Cover." No date. <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/Maps/KAZ/09/lc/index.html>

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: The Land: Relief." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

from the Russian border, around the northeastern side of the sea, to the Mangyshlak (Tupqaraghan) Peninsula on the sea's eastern edge. The terrain is similar to that of the semi-deserts and deserts of the surrounding region, although salt pans and domes are common and marshes and swamps can be found along the shoreline. While the depression reaches a maximum of 28 m (92 ft) below sea level,⁷ Kazakhstan's lowest point lies further south on the peninsula, in the Karagiye Depression at Vpadina Kaundy, where the elevation drops to -132 m (-432 ft).⁸ The depression and the adjacent seafloor of the Caspian hold huge reserves of oil and natural gas.

Mountains of the East and Southeast

Kazakhstan is rimmed by high mountain ranges in the east and southeast. In the far northeast, the Altai Mountains extend into Kazakhstan from nearby Russia and China. The range's highpoint of 4,506 m (14,783 ft) is located along the border with Russia. Farther south, along the eastern border with China, two smaller ranges, the Tarbagatay and the Alatau, extend into Kazakhstan; the latter of these is a northern extension of the Tien Shan Range to the south.⁹ The extensive Tien Shan Range, which runs through Kyrgyzstan and northwestern China, rings Kazakhstan on its southeastern edge. Kazakhstan's highest point, Khan Tengri, is located in this range; it reaches 6,995 m (22,958 ft) along the border with Kyrgyzstan. To the west, two other ranges extend into southern Kazakhstan: the Chu-Ili Mountains (to the west of Almaty) and the Karatau Range, which extends northwestward between the Chu and Syr Darya Rivers.¹⁰



© iStock.com
Mountains near Almaty

Climate

Kazakhstan's climate is determined by the surrounding land masses rather than air currents coming in off the oceans, which are too far away to be influential.¹¹ As a result, the country is generally semi-arid to arid with hot summers and cold winters. Temperatures vary according to region and elevation but generally grow warmer as one moves from the northern steppes (near Western Siberia) to the southern deserts. For example, in northern and central Kazakhstan, average temperatures in January range between -19° and -16°C (-2° and 3°F), whereas in the south, a range of -5° to -1.4°C (23° to 29°F) is average for that time. Likewise, average July temperatures in the north (20°C, or 68°F) are markedly cooler than those in the south (29°C, or 84°F). The country as a

⁷ Encyclopedia of Earth. World Wildlife Fund. McGinley, Mark. "Caspian Lowland Desert." 23 August 2008. https://eearth.com/article/Caspian_lowland_desert

⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Kazakhstan." 14 May 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>

⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: The Land: Relief." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

¹⁰ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 2: The Land and the Skies: Mountains [pp. 30–33]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

¹¹ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. "Geography: Climate [p. 12]." 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

whole is prone to extremes; record temperatures range from -45°C (-49°F) in the winter to 45°C (113°F) in the summer.¹²

Because it is landlocked from moist oceanic air currents, the majority of Kazakhstan receives little rainfall. Average annual precipitation is 35 cm (14 in) in the northern steppes but only 10 cm (4 in) or less in the southern deserts. The eastern mountains, however, may receive up to 150 cm (59 in),¹³ although a range of 41–51 cm (16–20 in) is more common for the surrounding valleys. Overall, because of the relatively dry air, sunshine and blue skies are frequent.¹⁴

Bodies of Water

Rivers

Most of Kazakhstan's major rivers have their headwaters in neighboring countries. Originating in the Altai Mountains of northwestern China, the Irtysh (Ertis) River enters Kazakhstan in the northeast, where it flows through Lake Zaysan and then northwestward into Russia. Utilized for hydroelectric power, the river is navigable for most of its length; Kazakhstan maintains ports at Öskemen, Semey, and Pavlodar.¹⁵ The Ishim, known as the Esil in Kazakhstan, is a predominantly snow-fed river that flows from the Kazakh Uplands through the capital, Astana, to the northern steppes, where it provides water to farms.¹⁶ In the west, the Ural River, known in Kazakhstan as the Zhayyq, originates in the Ural Mountains of Russia and flows southward into northwestern Kazakhstan; it ultimately flows into the Caspian Sea.¹⁷



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Ural River

In the south, the three major rivers are the Syr Darya, the Chu, and the Ili. Vital to several Central Asian countries, the Syr Darya has its headwaters in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. After entering southern Kazakhstan, it flows generally northwestward, ultimately emptying into the Aral Sea. The heavy draw of irrigation water from the river, mostly in Uzbekistan, has contributed to the dramatic shrinkage of the Aral Sea. The river is also severely polluted with agricultural chemicals.¹⁸ The Chu (Shū) River originates in the Tien Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan and flows generally northwestward toward south-

¹² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: The Land: Climate." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

¹³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "FAO Country Profiles: Kazakhstan: Geographic Description." 3 September 2007. <http://www.fao.org/forestry/18310/en/kaz/>

¹⁴ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. "Geography: Climate [p. 12]." 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

¹⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Irtysh River." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/294847/Irtysh-River>

¹⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ishim River." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/295316/Ishim-River>

¹⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ural River." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/619046/Ural-River>

¹⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Syr Darya." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578814/Syr-Darya>

central Kazakhstan, where it disappears into the desert. It is an important regional source of irrigation water.¹⁹ Finally, the Ili River also has its headwaters in the Tien Shan. It flows from China into southeastern Kazakhstan, where it empties into the massive Lake Balkhash.²⁰

Caspian Sea

A large portion of Kazakhstan's western border is formed by the shoreline of the Caspian Sea, the largest inland body of water in the world. Covering some 386,400 sq km (149,200 sq mi), the Caspian is larger than the state of Montana.²¹ Kazakhstan shares the sea and its rich resources with the four other countries bordering its shores: Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan. Long the world's primary source of caviar (from its stock of sturgeon), the sea is the site of massive oil and natural gas deposits. Their extraction has fueled the Kazakhstani economy but also contributed to local pollution levels, which are high.²² The sea has unexpectedly risen over the last three decades. In recent years alone the water level has increased over 2.5 m (8 ft), and it is projected to rise even further in the coming years. The surging sea level threatens Kazakhstan's coastal settlements with flooding and land loss, in part due to highly erosive tidal waves that destroy the coast.²³

Aral Sea

Once covering some 68,000 sq km (26,300 sq mi), the Aral Sea has shrunk dramatically over the last several decades. The primary cause of the sea's reduction has been the long-term diversion of water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, the sea's primary sources. Large-scale diversion began in the 1960s, when Soviet planners initiated massive irrigation-fed agricultural schemes in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.²⁴



The reduction of the sea, which divided into sections as it grew smaller, proved disastrous to the local environment, economy, and population. Most notably, the sea's increased salinity (due to its loss of freshwater input) made the water undrinkable and contributed

¹⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Chu River." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/116625/Chu-River>

²⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ili River." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/282775/Ili-River>

²¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Caspian Sea: Introduction." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/98044/Caspian-Sea>

²² *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Kazakhstan: Environment: The Caspian Sea [pp. 92–93]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

²³ United Nations Development Program Kazakhstan. *Water Resources of Kazakhstan in the New Millennium*. "Chapter 2: Kazakhstan's Contemporary Water Problems [pp. 35–36]." April 2004.

http://www.undp.kz/library_of_publications/files/2496-13297.pdf

²⁴ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Environment: Environmental Issues: The Aral Sea [pp. 68–69]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

to the decimation of the local fishing industry.²⁵ The receding waters also left behind a barren, salty wasteland containing chemical residues from fertilizers and pesticides.²⁶

After years of mostly failed attempts to address the sea's ongoing reduction, recent reclamation efforts have targeted what is now known as the North Aral Sea, a section that lies entirely in Kazakhstan. Completed in 2005, a dam on the southern side of the North Sea accumulates the input provided by the Syr Darya, thereby allowing the sea's levels to rise.²⁷ The sea has since been restocked with fish and a small fishing industry has reemerged.²⁸

Lake Balkhash

Located in eastern Kazakhstan, Lake Balkhash faces a similar threat as that of the Aral Sea, although the situation is currently less severe. The lake receives most of its freshwater input from two rivers: the Ili and the Karatal. Over the last several decades, various development projects, including large-scale agricultural schemes in western China, have diverted the flow of the Ili.²⁹ Combined with evaporation, the diversion of the lake's input has reduced its water levels and increased its salinity. Pollution from agricultural runoff and a local copper smelter have also threatened the lake's sustainability.³⁰



Major Cities

Almaty (Alma-Ata)

Almaty is located in southeastern Kazakhstan, in the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains. Founded as a Russian military outpost in 1854, the city grew rapidly during the Soviet era, when it served as the capital of the Kazakh Republic. It was then known as Alma-Ata, or “father of apples”—a reference to its native apple orchards. Its name was changed to Almaty after Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991. The city remained the country's capital until 1997, when the administrative seat was officially transferred to Astana.³¹ Today, Almaty is a major commercial and industrial hub. Although dominated

²⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Aral Sea.” 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/31983/Aral-Sea>

²⁶ *Kazakhstan* (The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia). Corrigan, Jim. “Chapter 2: The Land: Environmental Issues [pp. 28–32].” 2005. Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers.

²⁷ The Washington Post. Finn, Peter. “Aral Sea's Return Revives Withered Villages.” 10 July 2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/09/AR2007070902072.html>

²⁸ Environment News Service. “The Kazakh Miracle: Recovery of the North Aral Sea.” 1 August 2008.

<http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/aug2008/2008-08-01-01.asp>

²⁹ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. “Chapter 2: The Land and the Skies: Lakes and Inland Seas [p. 35].” 2003. London: Stacey International.

³⁰ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Kazakhstan: Efforts Underway to Save Lake Balkhash.” 3 May 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=71924>

³¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Almaty.” 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/16771/Almaty>

by Russians and Ukrainians, the city is also home to Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Tatars, Germans, and other ethnicities.³² Its population of 1.25 million makes it the country's largest city.³³

Astana

Formerly known as Akmola, Astana is situated alongside the Ishim River in the steppes of north-central Kazakhstan. With approximately 550,000 residents, it is the second most populous city in the country.³⁴ In 1994, it was selected, with some controversy, by Kazakhstani leader Nursultan Nazarbayev as the site of the nation's new capital. The government subsequently invested billions of dollars in the city, which was previously a provincial railroad town. It officially became the capital in 1997; in 1998, it was renamed Astana.³⁵ Today, it is home to large numbers of government employees (mostly Kazakhs), as well as railroad and industrial workers.³⁶ While its development remains ongoing, the city has been described as a symbol of the burgeoning Kazakhstani identity.³⁷

Shymkent (Chimkent)

Shymkent is situated on ancient trade routes in the foothills of south-central Kazakhstan, just north of Uzbekistan. The capital of the heavily populated South Kazakhstan oblast, it is home to approximately 526,000 people.³⁸ Shymkent grew rapidly during the Soviet era, when industry took root in the city. Today, it remains a major industrial hub, particularly for lead, cement, petroleum, chemicals, and food processing. It is also an important cultural center for the region and a transit point on the Turkistan–Siberia railway.³⁹

Atyrau

Located in northwestern Kazakhstan, Atyrau is situated on the Ural River, just north of the Caspian Sea. It was established in the 17th century as a fishing and trading post.⁴⁰ The village subsequently grew as residents



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Atyrau

³² *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Kazakhstan: Almaty [pp. 93–94]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

³³ City Population. UN Demographic Yearbook 2006. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Kazakhstan: Principal Cities." 22 February 2009. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Kazakhstan.html>

³⁴ City Population. UN Demographic Yearbook 2006. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Kazakhstan: Principal Cities." 22 February 2009. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Kazakhstan.html>

³⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Astana." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/39656/Astana>

³⁶ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Kazakhstan: North Kazakhstan: Astana [pp. 135–136]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

³⁷ EurasiaNet.org. Lillis, Joanna. "Kazakhstan: Astana's Anniversary Celebration Serves as a Showcase for New National Identity." 7 July 2008.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav070708.shtml>

³⁸ City Population. UN Demographic Yearbook 2006. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Kazakhstan: Principal Cities." 22 February 2009. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Kazakhstan.html>

³⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Chimkent." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/111610/Chimkent>

⁴⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Atyrau." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/42375/Atyrau>

exploited the Caspian Sea's sturgeon stocks for caviar.⁴¹ Today, Atyrau is an important port city and a transshipment center for the regional oil industry. As oil extraction in the Caspian Sea and surrounding deserts has boomed, the city has experienced renewed growth and development.⁴² Situated below sea level, Atyrau has become increasingly vulnerable to flooding as the sea level has risen in recent years. Its population is approximately 175,000.⁴³

History

Ancient History

The Saks (also known as the Scythians) were the first historically significant regional culture to occupy the area during the 1st millennium B.C.E. Originating in Iran, the Saks developed an empire that encompassed much of Central Asia and southern Russia, including the territory around the Black and Caspian seas. They were a nomadic people who were known as skillful equestrians and warriors.⁴⁴ One of Kazakhstan's most celebrated artifacts is the gold, ceremonial coat of armor of a Sak warrior, popularly known as the "Golden Man." The warrior's remains were found in a treasure-laden tomb in southeastern Kazakhstan.⁴⁵



In the 2nd century B.C.E., control of eastern Kazakhstan fell to the Usun (Wusun), a group of Turkic-speaking Mongol tribes from the east. They were a mixture of nomads and sedentary farmers.⁴⁶ The Usun were likely related to the Huns, a tribal confederation of nomadic pastoralists and warriors who migrated throughout Central Asia during this time.⁴⁷ After expanding westward from the Central Asian steppes, the Huns' empire collapsed following the death of their leader, the notorious warrior, Attila, in 453 C.E.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in the 5th and 6th centuries, repeated attacks from the Altai Turks in the east weakened the smaller, regional domain of the Usun.

⁴¹ *Kazakhstan* (The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia). Corrigan, Jim. "Chapter 6: Cities and Communities: Western Kazakhstan [pp. 98–99]." 2005. Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers.

⁴² BBC News, International Version. "In Pictures: Kazakh City of Atyrau." 21 July 2006.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/5191944.stm

⁴³ City Population. UN Demographic Yearbook 2006. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Kazakhstan: Principal Cities." 22 February 2009. <http://www.citypopulation.de/Kazakhstan.html>

⁴⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Scythian." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/530361/Scythian>

⁴⁵ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [p. 103]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁴⁶ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [p. 5]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁴⁷ Türkic History Site Map. Works of Kazakh SSR Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, Archeology, and Ethnography, Vol. 8. Zuev, Yury A. "Ethnic History of Usuns." 1960.

<http://www.s155239215.onlinehome.us/turkic/29Huns/Usuns/ZuevHunsandUsunsEn.htm#Huns>

⁴⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Hun." 2009.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/276414/Hun>

Over the next few centuries, regional power shifted between various confederations of Turkic tribes. During this time, settlements in southern Kazakhstan served as important northern outposts on the Silk Road, a series of trade routes connecting Europe and the Middle East with Asia. In the 8th century, Arabs took control of portions of the south, marking the introduction of Islam into the region. This Muslim presence was perpetuated by the Persian Samanids, who conquered the far south in the 9th century. In the 10th century, the Karakhanid Turks defeated the Karluks (another Turkic tribe) and the Samanids to take power in the region.⁴⁹ They retained the Samanids' practice of Islam. The Khitans (Karakitai), originally from Mongolia, displaced the Karakhanids in the 12th century.⁵⁰

The Mongols

In the early 13th century, Mongol armies under the command of Genghis Khan swept through the Kazakhstan region, razing numerous settlements in the south and killing or enslaving much of the local population.⁵¹ Over time, the Mongols influenced regional culture as the local, mostly Turkic tribes adopted aspects of their language, legal code, and social and administrative structure. After Genghis Khan died in 1227, the Mongol empire, which at that time stretched from the Caspian Sea to the eastern coast of China, was divided among his male heirs. His son, Chagatai, and grandson, Batu, split the Kazakhstan region. Batu's empire became known as the Golden Horde and Chagatai's territory became known as the Chagatai Khanate.⁵²

The Kazakhs

Following the decline of the Chagatai Khanate and the Golden Horde, a smaller state, the Uzbek Khanate, emerged in south-central Kazakhstan in the early 15th century. Around 1465, two Uzbeks, Janibek and Kirai, led an estimated 200,000 followers into the region between the Chu and Talas rivers in southeastern Kazakhstan, where they staked territorial claims in defiance of the current Uzbek leadership.⁵³ The followers of Janibek and Kirai became known as Kazakhs, a term that likely referred to their independent, nomadic ways, in contrast to those of the Uzbeks, who practiced a more settled, agricultural lifestyle.⁵⁴ They were essentially the descendents of the Mongol, Turkic, and various other peoples who had roamed or occupied the region over the centuries.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Kazakh people in a yurt, ca. 1900

⁴⁹ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 5–6]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁵⁰ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Kazakhstan: History [p. 86]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

⁵¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Genghis Khan." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/229093/Genghis-Khan>

⁵² *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 6–7]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁵³ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 7–8]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁵⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: History: Kazakhstan to 1700." 2009.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

According to most accounts, the Kazakh Khanate formally organized under Qasim Kahn, who ruled from around 1511 to 1523.⁵⁵ During this time, Qasim expanded the khanate's domain, consolidated its political power, and incorporated additional regional tribes into the Kazakh fold. In the mid-to-late 16th century, three administrative divisions within the Kazakh Khanate emerged. Commonly known as hordes but more accurately described as *juz* (*zhuz*), or tribal unions, these divisions corresponded with specific geographic regions of the country. The Great Horde seasonally migrated throughout the southeast, the Middle Horde controlled the central, northern, and northeastern areas, and the Lesser Horde roamed throughout the west.⁵⁶

After expanding their nomadic pastoral empire to include most of modern-day Kazakhstan, the Kazakhs faced encroaching powers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Kalmyks (also known as the Jungars/Dzungars), a subgroup of the Mongol Oyrats, came from the east, staging attacks on settlements and disrupting trade. After overtaking much of the Kazakhs' eastern territory, the Kalmyks advanced upon the economically important Syr Darya basin in 1723, forcing the Kazakhs to flee the region in what is known today as the Great Retreat.⁵⁷



© Ilya Yefimovich Repin
Portrait of a Kalmyk

Russian Expansion

As part of its vast expansion throughout northern Eurasia, Russia's gradual encroachment into Kazakh territory began in the 17th century, when trading and military outposts were established along the Ural River, north of the Caspian Sea.⁵⁸ In the 18th century, Russian forts were constructed along the northern edge of the steppes in present-day Kazakhstan, including those at Semey (Semipalatinsk) and Öskemen (Ust-Kamenogorsk).⁵⁹ Following the Great Retreat, Abul Khayr, leader of the Lesser Horde, pledged allegiance to the Russian Empire in 1731 as part of an effort to preserve Kazakh interests amid the onslaught of the Kalymks. His cooperation with Russia effectively ended the Kazakh Khanate.⁶⁰ In the following decade, the leaders of the Middle Horde, as well as a faction of the Great Horde, signed similar treaties of protection with Russia.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Kazakhstan: A Country Study*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakstan: Historical Background: Historical Setting: Forming the Modern Nation." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0014\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0014))

⁵⁶ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 10–14]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁵⁷ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 25–26]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁵⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Kazakhstan: A Country Study*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakstan: Historical Background: Historical Setting: Forming the Modern Nation." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0014\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0014))

⁵⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: History: Russian and Soviet Rule." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

⁶⁰ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 26–27]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁶¹ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 3: The Development of a Colonial Apparatus [pp. 71–72]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

Despite these treaties, the Kazakhs' subsequent relations with Russia were unstable and marred by conflict and rebellion. Ablai Khan, of the Middle Horde, emerged as the dominant Kazakh leader in the mid 18th century. While making efforts to unify the Kazakh tribes, he shrewdly cultivated relations with Russia, China, and the Dzungar (Kalmyk) state while occasionally staging attacks on their interests.⁶² After his death in 1781, the Kazakh tribes quickly lost the unity that had developed under his consolidated rule.⁶³

Russian Annexation and Settlement

Over the course of the following century, Russia took advantage of its treaties of protection over the Kazakh Hordes to gradually annex their territories, a process that included the steady construction of additional defensive lines throughout the region. At the same time, it promoted colonial settlement in the area.⁶⁴ These developments disrupted traditional Kazakh migratory patterns and led to severe economic instability and disgruntlement among the Kazakh peoples.⁶⁵ From the late 18th to late 19th centuries, the Kazakhs staged numerous organized revolts, all of which were ultimately suppressed by Russian forces. Large numbers of Kazakhs died during this time.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the fractured Kazakh Hordes lost their formal authority within the Russian administrative structure. The empire officially abolished the Middle Horde in 1822, followed by the Lesser and Great Hordes in 1824 and 1848, respectively.⁶⁷

By the 1870s, the Russian annexation of the territory comprising modern-day Kazakhstan was virtually complete.⁶⁸ Shortly thereafter, the empire ordered massive numbers of Russian and Ukrainian peasant farmers to settle on the steppes of Kazakhstan. By 1917, nearly three million settlers had been relocated to the region, resulting in the large-scale appropriation and agricultural development of Kazakh lands.⁶⁹ This devastated the Kazakhs' nomadic lifestyle and pastoral economy, as much of their traditional pastureland was made inaccessible.

⁶² *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [pp. 126–127]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁶³ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 2: The Russian Conquest [pp. 41–43]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁶⁴ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [pp. 127–128]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁶⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Kazakhstan*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakhstan: Historical Background: Historical Setting: Forming the Modern Nation." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0014\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0014))

⁶⁶ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, and Michael Kohn. "Kazakhstan: History [p. 87]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

⁶⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: History: Russian and Soviet Rule." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

⁶⁸ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 3: The Development of a Colonial Apparatus [pp. 71–82]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

⁶⁹ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 4: The Land Problem [pp. 83, 90]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

Early Soviet Policy in the Steppe

In 1917, Russia's weakened imperial government collapsed under pressure from Marxist revolutionaries. Civil war between the provisional Soviet government—led by the Bolsheviks—and royalist, anti-Bolshevik forces waged from 1918–1920. After the Soviets emerged victorious, they reestablished control over the Kazakh region, where an indigenous Kazakh political party, known as Alash Orda, had made efforts to form a provisional government.⁷⁰ The Soviets named the greater area the Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic on 20 August 1920. In 1925, three years after the official establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), the region was reconfigured and renamed the Kazakh Autonomous Republic. It later became a full Soviet Republic in 1936 under the national leadership of Joseph Stalin.⁷¹



Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, Stalin consolidated his power. A brutal program of collectivization in the countryside was followed by massive purges of suspected enemies within the government, including many from the ranks of the Communist Party. Numerous prison and labor camps, known as *gulags*, were established in Kazakhstan, the most notorious of which were located around Qaraghandy. Similarly, during World War II, large numbers of ethnic Germans, Chechens, Tatars, Kalmyks, and other groups were exiled to Kazakhstan due to their perceived threat to Soviet security. At this time, German forces were advancing into the Soviet Union's European regions.⁷² The German threat also prompted Soviet planners to shift industrial production from the nation's European territory—the site of the war's front lines—to the seemingly remote, isolated region of Central Asia. Metallurgical factories, chemical plants, and mines—particularly of coal and copper—were among those that were developed or expanded in the Kazakh Republic. The growth of these industrial sites would correspond with urbanization in the following years.⁷³

The Soviet Era: Post-World War II

After the war, Kazakhstan was selected as the site of a now notorious Soviet weapons testing program. Beginning in 1949, the Soviet military exploded nearly 500 nuclear bombs at a testing site outside of Semey, then known as Semipalatinsk. These tests—more than 100 of which took place above ground—continued throughout the Cold War until the final years of Soviet rule. In many cases, the local civilian inhabitants were neither warned nor evacuated before the explosions occurred. As a result, the regional

⁷⁰ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [p. 134]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁷¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: History: Russian and Soviet Rule." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

⁷² *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [pp. 136–141]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁷³ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [p. 138]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

population has since demonstrated high rates of illness, including cancers and birth defects.⁷⁴



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Nikita Krushchev

Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, attempted to transform the U.S.S.R.'s unproductive steppe land, principally in Kazakhstan, into a grain growing region. Initiated in 1954, the Virgin Lands Campaign was viewed as a form of Russification by the Kazakh since it ushered in another wave of Slavic migration.⁷⁵ The 1960s and 1970s were a period of increased industrialization in the Kazakh Republic, as the Soviet Union expanded its efforts to exploit the region's vast energy and mineral reserves. By this time, Russian culture had become a dominant influence, particularly in terms of language and education. Indeed, the establishment of schools and the increase in regional literacy rates were some of the major benefits of the Soviet era.⁷⁶ The Kazakhs, however, had become a minority due to the influxes of other ethnic groups, mainly Slavs (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian), and the large-scale losses of their own people during the Stalinist collectivization drive.⁷⁷

The Decline of the Soviet Union

By the mid 1980s, the U.S.S.R. was in a state of serious economic decline. In the following years, as the power of the central Soviet government waned, calls for greater autonomy within the Soviet Republics increased. After his election as the First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party in 1989, Nursultan Nazarbayev, a former engineer, navigated the republic's gradual transition to an independent state. After a failed coup attempt and the banning of the Communist Party, the crumbling U.S.S.R. formally dissolved in December 1991. Nazarbayev won an uncontested presidential election on 1 December, and Kazakhstan formally declared its independence 15 days later, on 16 December.⁷⁸

Independent Kazakhstan

Nazarbayev's policies have since determined the political, economic, and social trajectory of the nation. In the immediate years following independence, Nazarbayev

⁷⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Kazakhstan: A Country Study*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakhstan: Physical Environment: Environmental Problems." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0022\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0022))

⁷⁵ Russian and Eur-Asian Bulletin. Alexandrov, Mikhail. "Russian Migration to Kazakhstan." June 1996. <http://www.cerc.unimelb.edu.au/bulletin/buljun.htm>

⁷⁶ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day: The Soviet Legacy [p. 148]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁷⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Kazakhstan*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakhstan: Historical Background: Historical Setting: In the Soviet Union." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0016\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0016))

⁷⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Kazakhstan*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakhstan: Historical Background: Sovereignty and Independence." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0019\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0019))

instituted moderate democratic reforms.⁷⁹ However, claiming the need to distill ethnic tension between the nation's Kazakh and Slavic constituencies, his administration sought to tightly control the democratization process.⁸⁰ In 1993, Kazakhstan adopted its first constitution, which invested the Kazakhstani Parliament with considerable power.⁸¹ In 1995, Nazarbayev dissolved Parliament and called for new elections. Shortly thereafter, he held a referendum to extend his term as President until the year 2000, effectively bypassing the planned 1996 election. The referendum passed in April 1995 with overwhelming support. Later that year, the Nazarbayev government drafted a revised constitution that greatly expanded presidential powers.⁸²

Nazarbayev continued to tighten his grip on power in the following years.⁸³ He easily won the next presidential election, which was abruptly rescheduled from early 2000 to January 1999. Similarly, he won another term in 2005, after the 2006 presidential election was held one year early. The latter election was held after the Nazarbayev government imposed various restrictions on opposition parties. Since the late 1990s, allegations of corruption have plagued the Nazarbayev government, despite longstanding and highly publicized campaigns against such practices. Nazarbayev himself has been criticized for personally profiting from various business and development deals, as well as filling high-ranking government, industry, and media positions with friends and family members.⁸⁴



On balance, however, while Nazarbayev's authoritarian presidential rule has engendered criticism both inside and outside the country, Kazakhstan has become a bulwark of stability in a region prone to ethnic strife, religious extremism, and other potential threats to peace and prosperity. Indeed, impressive economic growth, along with his government's commitment to regional security, have served to shield Nazarbayev from greater international censure regarding corruption and the slow pace of democratization in Kazakhstan.⁸⁵ Recent parliamentary elections—held in August 2007—demonstrated improvements in the electoral process but were cited as insufficient to move the country

⁷⁹ *Kazakhstan* (The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia). Corrigan, Jim. "Chapter 3: The History: Era of Independence [p. 48]." 2005. Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers.

⁸⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: Book of the Year 1994." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9115170>

⁸¹ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 4: Heritage and History to the Present Day [p. 153]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

⁸² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: Book of the Year 1996." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9112770>

⁸³ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Blua, Antoine. "Kazakhstan: In Keeping With Central Asian Tradition, Nazarbaev To Seek Additional Term." 17 May 2004. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1052820.html>

⁸⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Country Profile: Kazakhstan. "Historical Background." December 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Kazakhstan.pdf>

⁸⁵ Telegraph. Bloomfield, Adrian. "Election time in a dictator's paradise." 3 December 2005. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kazakhstan/1504643/Election-time-in-a-dictators-paradise.html>

toward genuine political pluralism by foreign electoral observers.⁸⁶ That same year, a constitutional amendment personally exempted Nazarbayev from the country's two-term limit for the presidency, effectively allowing him to remain in power beyond 2012, when his current term ends.⁸⁷

Economy

When it became an independent nation in December 1991, Kazakhstan inherited a deteriorating command (or state-run) economy, a large percentage of which was still under the complete or partial control of central authorities in Moscow during the final months of the U.S.S.R.⁸⁸ The initial post-Soviet period was marked by economic decline, as Kazakhstan lost its huge fixed market for its industrial and agricultural products. Led by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Kazakhstani government soon made efforts to transition to an independent, market-based economy. This process involved the establishment of a national currency (*tenge*), the privatization of business and assets, and the attraction of foreign investment. These reforms allowed for the gradual development of the country's immense energy and mineral deposits. Beginning in 2000, the Kazakhstani economy began to expand rapidly, largely due to the growth of the energy sector.⁸⁹



The economic boom led to rapid development in the country, although cronyism and corruption reportedly funneled a large share of the economic gains to a small class of connected elites.⁹⁰ Today, Kazakhstan has a mixed economy that features both private and state-owned companies. Despite efforts to diversify, it remains heavily dependent upon the energy sector. A GDP dominated by the sale of natural resources can mask high levels of unemployment and underemployment.⁹¹

Industry

The extraction of the nation's rich energy deposits—some of the largest in the world—accounts for a major share of Kazakhstan's industrial activity (and overall economic output). As of 2008, the oil industry alone was responsible for approximately 30% of the country's



⁸⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: Book of the Year 2000." 2000. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9437872>

⁸⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: History: Independent Kazakhstan." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

⁸⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Kazakhstan*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Kazakhstan: Historical Background: Historical Setting: In the Soviet Union." Glenn E. Curtis, Ed. 1996. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2?r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kz0016\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2?r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kz0016))

⁸⁹ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Kazakhstan." April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

⁹⁰ *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 4: Trying Pluralism and Abandoning It [p. 124]." 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

⁹¹ Bard College. Reingold, Jonathan. "The Curse of Oil Wealth." Spring 2005. <http://www.bard.edu/bgia/bardpolitik/vol6/15oilwealth.pdf>

GDP.⁹² The Tengiz (onshore) and Kashagan (offshore) oil fields in the northeastern region of the Caspian Sea hold a large portion of Kazakhstan's oil reserves. Numerous pipelines connect Kazakhstani oil fields with regional and global markets; several others are in development.⁹³ During the global economic downturn, declining oil prices slowed the country's economic growth in 2008. Oil production is projected to rise substantially in the coming decade, at which point Kazakhstan could become one of the top 10 oil-producing nations in the world.⁹⁴

In addition to fossil fuels, Kazakhstan possesses massive reserves of other mineral resources, the extraction and processing of which have greatly contributed to the nation's industrial output. The country has major deposits of iron ore, lead, copper, chromite, gold, zinc, bauxite, manganese, and uranium. Since the country initiated market reforms, foreign investment has funded the development or expansion of mining and metallurgical operations, many of which were initiated during the Soviet era and in serious need of rehabilitation. Efforts to diversify the economy have concentrated on the expansion of the manufacturing sector, which has attracted significantly less foreign investment.⁹⁵ Major products within this sector include machinery, construction materials, chemical fertilizers, processed food, synthetic textiles, and pharmaceuticals.⁹⁶

Agriculture



The Soviet legacy remains especially evident in the agricultural sector. Decades of large-scale development and intensive cultivation practices vastly expanded the area under cultivation but also resulted in severe environmental damage. After independence, agriculture was overshadowed by the development of the energy sector.⁹⁷ In 1990, agriculture accounted for approximately 35% of the Kazakh Republic's GDP.⁹⁸ By 2008, this

percentage had fallen to an estimated 5.8%.⁹⁹ Despite its relatively small economic contribution, agriculture remains an important source of jobs. As of 2005, the most recent year with available estimates, approximately 31.5% of the population worked in

⁹² Energy Information Administration. "Country Analysis Brief: Kazakhstan: Background." February 2008. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Kazakhstan/Background.html>

⁹³ Energy Information Administration. "Country Analysis Brief: Kazakhstan: Oil." February 2008. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Kazakhstan/Oil.html>

⁹⁴ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Kazakhstan." April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

⁹⁵ U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior. Levine, Richard M. and Glenn J. Wallace. "2005 Minerals Yearbook: Commonwealth of Independent States [pp. 7.5–7.7]." December 2007.

<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2005/myb3-2005-am-aj-bo-gg-kz-kg-md-rs-ti-tx-up-uz.pdf>

⁹⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kazakhstan: The Economy: Industry." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313790/Kazakhstan>

⁹⁷ EurasiaNet.org. Nurskenova, Assel. "Kazakhstan Has High Hopes for Agricultural Reform." 29 January 2004. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav012904.shtml>

⁹⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Kazakhstan." December 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Kazakhstan.pdf>

⁹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Kazakhstan." 30 July 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/KZ.html>

agriculture and animal husbandry.¹⁰⁰ The nation's primary agricultural product is wheat; it annually produces some 14–15 million tons of the crop, making it the seventh-largest wheat producer in the world. Livestock and animal products, including meat, dairy goods, and wool, are also important commodities.¹⁰¹

Trade and Foreign Investment

Fuel and mineral extraction has driven Kazakhstan's foreign trade over the last decade. Because of the high value and increasing volume of its oil exports, Kazakhstan has carried a trade surplus since 1999.¹⁰² Mineral products, including fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, comprised roughly 73% of Kazakhstani exports in 2008, with metals accounting for an additional 15.2%. Major imports for that year included machinery and equipment, metals, mineral products, and chemicals. Kazakhstan's leading export markets include Italy, Switzerland, China, and Russia. Its primary sources of imports are Russia, China, Germany, and Ukraine.¹⁰³ Overall, Kazakhstan's most important trade partner is Russia, with whom it has carried a negative trade balance in recent years.¹⁰⁴ Kazakhstan has received substantial foreign direct investment (FDI) since it initiated its economic liberalization in 1993. Between 1993 and mid 2008, total FDI in Kazakhstan amounted to just over USD 76 billion. The U.S. has been the nation's leading investor, providing USD 16.8 billion during that time. Russia, China, and various European countries have also provided significant amounts of investment. Extractive industries have received a large portion of the nation's FDI.¹⁰⁵



Government

Kazakhstan is a constitutional republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Under Nursultan Nazarbayev, governmental power has been largely consolidated in the executive branch. He holds the power to introduce constitutional amendments, dissolve parliament, call for referenda, and appoint various high-level officials; the latter include the prime minister, his cabinet, the members of the National Security Committee (KNB), and a set number of parliamentary representatives. Since taking power in 1989 (during the final years of the U.S.S.R.), Nazarbayev has won several presidential elections; at least two of them were deemed unfair by international observers. By constitutional amendment, he retains the exclusive

¹⁰⁰ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Kazakhstan." 30 July 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/KZ.html>

¹⁰¹ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Kazakhstan." April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

¹⁰² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Kazakhstan." December 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Kazakhstan.pdf>

¹⁰³ Economist.com. Economist Intelligence Unit. "Country Briefings: Kazakhstan: Factsheet." 9 June 2009. <http://www.economist.com/countries/Kazakhstan/profile.cfm?folder=Profile-FactSheet>

¹⁰⁴ International Trade Centre. "Trade Performance HS: Exports and Imports of Kazakhstan – 00 All Industries (2006, in USD Thousands)." http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_TP_CI_P.aspx?IN=00&RP=398&YR=2006&IL=00%20%20All%20industries&TY=T

¹⁰⁵ Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "2008 Investment Climate Statement – Kazakhstan." February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2009/117413.htm>

right to serve an unlimited number of presidential terms. Those close to him enjoy lavish lifestyles. Yet he has a large popular following, particularly among the young and educated. In their view, the president “is a man who has delivered to the energy-rich country a level of stability and prosperity unheard of elsewhere in Central Asia. Why risk losing all that with someone new and untested?”¹⁰⁶

Nazarbayev’s consolidation of power has left the bicameral parliament of the legislative branch with limited authority. Parliament consists of a Senate and a larger body of representatives known as the Mazhilis.¹⁰⁷ Members of Nazarbayev’s Nur Otan (“Light of the Fatherland”) political party overwhelmingly dominate parliament. The judicial branch is headed by a 44-member Supreme Court and 7-member Constitutional Council.¹⁰⁸ The country is organized into 17 administrative divisions: 14 provinces (or oblasts), two major cities (Astana and Almaty), and the Russian-leased territory encompassing the Baikonur Cosmodrome. The governors of these administrative regions are appointed by the president.¹⁰⁹



Media

Although freedom of speech and freedom of the press are nominally provided by the constitution, the Kazakhstani government maintains tight restrictions on media and expression. The government owns approximately one fifth of the nation’s media outlets, and it subsidizes many of the country’s privately owned outlets. Moreover, the vast majority of private broadcast media are thought to be owned by holding companies controlled by Nazarbayev’s business associates and relatives.¹¹⁰ For example, Nazarbayev’s daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, was formerly in charge of Khabar, Kazakhstan’s state-run news agency, and she remains a powerful media mogul.¹¹¹ In this way, through direct control or influence, the government determines much of the media’s programming.

Furthermore, media outlets are required to register with the government, and they are subject to licensing and legal restrictions. The latter include laws against insulting President Nazarbayev and other high-level government officials. Such restrictions are often used to subject the country’s independent media outlets to criminal libel law suits.

¹⁰⁶ Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe. Najibullah, Faranjis. “Kazakhstan’s Nazarbaev Marks 20 Years In Power.” 21 June 2009.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Kazakhstans_Nazarbaev_Marks_20_Years_In_Power/1759332.html

¹⁰⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Kazakhstan.” December 2006.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Kazakhstan.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. “Kazakhstan.” 30 July 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/KZ.html>

¹⁰⁹ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Kazakhstan.” April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

¹¹⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. 2008 Human Rights Report: Kazakhstan. “2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.” 25 February 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/sca/119135.htm>

¹¹¹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Pannier, Bruce. “Kazakhstan: Media Ownership Leaves Little Room for Independence.” 25 May 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1076718.html>

Likewise, independent journalists often encounter harassment, intimidation, and violence, particularly those reporting on corruption and organized crime.¹¹² In July 2009, Nazarbayev signed a bill expanding the government's media restrictions to cover internet resources, such as blogs and chat rooms, which previously served as arenas for free expression and information access.¹¹³ The law also placed limits on media coverage of political matters such as elections, strikes, and assemblies.¹¹⁴

Ethnic Groups

Kazakhstan has a diverse population due to the large-scale immigration or relocation of various ethnic groups to the region during the colonial and Soviet eras. According to the most recent census with available data (1999), the Kazakhstani population consists of Kazakhs (53.4%), Russians (30%), Ukrainians (3.7%), Uzbeks (2.5%), Germans (2.4%), Tatars (1.7%), Uyghurs (1.4%), and various other ethnicities (4.9%).¹¹⁵ Kazakhs are predominant in the south and in rural areas, while Russians, Ukrainians, and Germans are concentrated mostly in the north and in urban centers.¹¹⁶ Its Uzbek population is concentrated in south-central Kazakhstan (near Uzbekistan), while the country's Uyghurs are concentrated in the southeast, near their ancestral homeland in the Xinjiang Province of western China.



Although Kazakhs are now the nation's predominant ethnic group, they were a minority in the region for much of the Soviet era. Following independence, the country's ethnic composition changed significantly, as Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, and other ethnicities left the country in large numbers. While the Germans received financial incentives from the German government to return to their native country, many of the Russians and Ukrainians left due to ethnic tensions, including their perceived loss of economic opportunity in a nation increasingly dominated by Kazakhs.¹¹⁷ Kazakhstan's independence also compelled many expatriate Kazakhs to return to their native homeland from various countries. These returnees are known as *oralmans*.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. 2008 Human Rights Report: Kazakhstan. "2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." 25 February 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/sca/119135.htm>

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch. "Kazakhstan: Rescind New Media Restrictions." 14 July 2009.

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/07/14/kazakhstan-rescind-new-media-restrictions>

¹¹⁴ EurasiaNet.org. Lillis, Joanna. "Kazakhstan: Activists Assail Internet Law as Step Back for Democratization." 24 July 2009. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav072409a.shtml>

¹¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Kazakhstan." 30 July 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/KZ.html>

¹¹⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Kazakhstan." December 2006.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Kazakhstan.pdf>

¹¹⁷ *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 6: A Divided Society [pp. 174–177]." 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹¹⁸ United Nations Development Programme, Kazakhstan. "Status of Oralman in Kazakhstan [p. 8]." 2006. http://www.undp.kz/library_of_publications/files/6838-29587.pdf

Languages

Kazakh is the nation's official "state" language, a designation that dates to 1989, when Nursultan Nazarbayev initiated pro-Kazakh reforms in the waning years of the U.S.S.R. In the country's first constitution (1993), Russian was recognized as the official language of "inter-ethnic communication." This designation effectively acknowledged the wide use of the Russian language, which members of all ethnic groups had learned in school and used in the public sphere under the Soviets.¹¹⁹ The Russian language was later given "official" status in the country's 1997 language law. However, the law retained Kazakh as the only "state" language, and it simultaneously called for the increased use of Kazakh in official documentation and media broadcasts.¹²⁰ This policy alienated many ethnic Russians (and other non-Kazakhs), as their opportunities to work in the government sector have since been hampered by their lack of Kazakh language skills. (At the time of the 1999 census, only 15% of the ethnic-Russian population claimed proficiency in Kazakh.¹²¹) Furthermore, as part of the government's push to expand the use of Kazakh, many non-Kazakh children are now required to learn the language in school.

As a legacy of the Soviet era, many Kazakhs are more fluent in Russian than in Kazakh.¹²² According to estimates made in 2001, roughly 95% of the population can speak Russian, while approximately 64% speak Kazakh.¹²³ Bilingualism is common. Broadly, Russian remains the language of commerce and the lingua franca, or the language spoken between members of different ethnic groups. The Kazakhstani government has announced tentative plans to replace the Soviet-instituted Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin alphabet. Such a transition would occur over a 12–15 year period, according to the government. Kazakhstani officials stated that "boosting the national identity of the Kazakh people is the main and decisive" reason for the proposed change—one that would replace the "Soviet (colonial) identity" with a "sovereign (Kazakh) identity."¹²⁴ Aside from Kazakh and Russian, additional languages, such as German, Uyghur, and Ukrainian, are spoken by the country's ethnic minorities.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Saint Anselm College, The New Hampshire Institute of Politics. Nauruzbayeva, Zhanara. "Paradoxes of Kazakh Language 'Revival' in Kazakhstan." 2002. <http://www.anselm.edu/NR/rdonlyres/FC460641-E210-4AC7-9401-E470E25B9FAC/1262/20024.pdf>

¹²⁰ *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Dave, Bhavna. "Chapter 5: Enshrining Kazakh as the State Language [pp. 100–102]." 2007. London: Routledge.

¹²¹ *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Dave, Bhavna. "Chapter 5: Enshrining Kazakh as the State Language [p. 113]." 2007. London: Routledge.

¹²² *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 3: The Challenge of Creating Kazakhstan [pp. 73–74]" and "Chapter 6: A Divided Society [pp. 177–178]." 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹²³ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Kazakhstan." 30 July 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/KZ.html>

¹²⁴ EurasiaNet.org. Bartlett, Paul. "Kazakhstan: Moving Forward with Plan to Replace Cyrillic with Latin Alphabet." 4 September 2007. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090407.shtml>

¹²⁵ Ethnologue.com. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th edition. M. Paul Lewis, Ed. "Languages of Kazakhstan." 2005. Dallas: SIL International. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=KZ

Chapter 2 Religion

Introduction

The Kazakhs traditionally practiced a folk religion that combined aspects of animism, shamanism, and ancestor worship. Islam, which initially came to the region in the 8th century, was not widely accepted among the Kazakhs until the late 18th and early 19th centuries.¹²⁶ The Kazakhs synthesized Islam with their traditional religious practices to produce what some observers have called a “folk Islam,” an informal version of the religion.¹²⁷ At the same time, as the Russian Empire expanded into the Kazakh steppe, Slavic (i.e., Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian) peoples migrated to the region, bringing with them Russian Orthodox and other Christian traditions. In the Soviet era, religious activity was largely suppressed by the communist state, which was officially atheist. While Kazakhstan has experienced a moderate religious revival in the independent era, the Soviet legacy remains influential on religious policy and practice.

Today, representatives of some 40 different faiths can be found among the more than 100 ethnic groups that live in Kazakhstan.¹²⁸ Ethnic Slavs, who together comprise about one third of the population, are predominantly Christian, with most of them belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church. The majority of Kazakhs are affiliated with Sunni Islam, the country’s predominant religion; the nation’s ethnic Uzbek, Uyghur, and Tatar communities are also traditionally Muslim. Among the Kazakhs, active participation in Islam is not widespread, however, largely due to their nomadic heritage and the legacy of Soviet secularism.¹²⁹ Likewise, some Kazakhs continue to observe elements of ancient belief systems, while others identify themselves as nonbelievers.¹³⁰ Overall, the Kazakhs’ identification with Islam is more often a matter of cultural heritage than faith-based devotion. This has essentially been the policy of the state, which has generally promoted religion as tradition rather than faith.¹³¹



© Wendy@lickr.com
Blessings from the world religions, Astana

¹²⁶ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [p. 18].” 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

¹²⁷ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakhstan Institutions: Religions and Society [pp. 217–218].” 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹²⁸ VOA News. Gergely, Valer. “Different Religions Coexist in Modern Kazakhstan.” 22 June 2007. <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2007-06/2007-06-22-voa33.cfm?moddate=2007-06-22>

¹²⁹ *Kazakhstan (Cultures of the World)*. Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Religion: Islam in Kazakhstan Today [p. 74].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

¹³⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2008 Report on International Religious Freedom*. “Kazakhstan.” 19 September 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108501.htm>

¹³¹ *Kazakhstan: Unfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 6: A Divided Society [p. 209].” 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Folk Religion and Islam

The Turkic and Mongol tribes that gave rise to the Kazakhs worshipped Tengri, a deity associated with the sky and the whole of nature. The Kazakhs' nomadic pastoral lifestyle, which revolved around the seasonal migration of livestock, was well-suited to a religious belief system tied to nature.¹³² Accordingly, the Kazakhs practiced animism, in which spirits are believed to inhabit animals and natural objects and phenomena, such as fire. They believed that their ancestors inhabited the sun, moon, earth, and various species of animals, including those upon which their pastoral livelihood depended. They relied upon these spirits to protect them from evil (*kesir*), which they believed was locked in an eternal struggle with good (*kei*). The services of a shaman (*baksy*) were called upon when assistance from the spirits was deemed necessary.¹³³ Sacrifices and other ceremonial rites were performed to appeal to the spirits and retain their favor.¹³⁴



© Tuluur peoples/wikipedia.org
Traditional depiction of Tengri

The nomadic lifestyle did not lend itself to routine rituals, such as daily prayer at prescribed times. This was one reason that Islam—which was more codified than Tengriism and other indigenous religions—was slow to make inroads among nomadic peoples after it was introduced to the Central Asian region in the 8th century.¹³⁵ In the case of the Kazakhs, who emerged in the 15th century, their largely self-sufficient lifestyle did not bring them into extensive contact with the trading settlements in the south, where Islam was by that time firmly established. As a result, the Kazakhs did not widely adopt the religion until the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The new faith was not imposed by Arab armies but rather spread by Sufi mystics.¹³⁶

Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, largely operates outside the formal dictates of traditional, mosque-centered Muslim worship. The basic objective of its practice is to obtain a direct, personal connection with Allah. Practitioners organize themselves into lay communities, or brotherhoods (*tariqa*), around a spiritual leader (*shaykh*); he assists them in connecting with Allah through meditation, contemplation of nature, and a variety of other mystical or ascetic means. Upon the *shaykh*'s death, his tomb becomes a shrine for the brotherhood. These practices were well-suited to the nomadic lifestyle and religious sensibilities of the Kazakhs, whose poets and bards incorporated Sufi thought into their

¹³² *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Dave, Bhavna. “Chapter 2: From Nomadism to National Consciousness [p. 34].” 2007. New York: Routledge.

¹³³ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Religion: Ancient Practices [pp. 76–77].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

¹³⁴ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 1: Origins of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 19–20].” 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

¹³⁵ Central Asia Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University. *Central Asia Caucasus Institute Analyst*. Laruelle, Marlene. “Tengriism: In Search for Central Asia’s Spiritual Roots.” 22 March 2006. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3837>

¹³⁶ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 18–20].” 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

work.¹³⁷ Today, the Kazakhstani city of Turkestan is the site of the most venerated Sufi shrine in Central Asia: the tomb of Qoja Ahmet Yasawi, a Sufi leader who established an important *tariqa* in the 12th century.^{138,139}

Over time, the Kazakhs incorporated aspects of Islam and Sufism into their existing belief system, with little distinction made between the traditional form of the religion and its mystical branch. Allah and his message, as revealed by the Prophet Muhammad, essentially assumed the role of the good, or *kei*, within the Kazakh religious system.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the Sufi veneration of saints corresponded with the Kazakhs' practice of ancestor worship, with Sufi shrines serving as sites to honor the spirits of the Kazakh dead. Overall, the Kazakhs' synthesis of religious beliefs produced an informal version of Islam that suited their lifestyle and allowed for the simultaneous observance of indigenous religious practices.¹⁴¹



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Central mosque in Pavlodar

Today, the Islamic faith remains associated with the nomadic era, which explains the Kazakhs' pride in their religious heritage even though their participation in the religion is neither scrupulous nor widespread. Sufism, in particular, is seen as a vital component of religious identity in Central Asia; for many, it represents a peaceful alternative to the doctrinal forms of Islam that have given rise to politicized fundamentalism.¹⁴² Sufi culture was heavily suppressed in Central Asia during the Soviet era, however, resulting in a loss of familiarity with its history and traditions among the regional populace.¹⁴³ Today, Kazakhs continue to make little or no distinction between Sufism and Islam, and, with often limited historical and textual knowledge of Islam, they continue to observe it in their own way.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 19–21]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

¹³⁸ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. "Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakhstan Institutions: Religion and Society [p. 217]." 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹³⁹ The Jamestown Foundation. *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 2, No. 16. Schwartz, Stephen. "Hizb Ut-tahrir In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: A Comparative Analysis." 11 August 2004. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26752

¹⁴⁰ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 18–20]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

¹⁴¹ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakhstan Institutions: Religion and Society [pp. 217–218]." 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁴² *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Khalid, Adeeb. "Chapter 5: The Revival of Islam [p. 121]." 2007. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁴³ The Nixon Center. Zeyno Baran, Ed. "Understanding Sufism and its Potential Role in US Policy." March 2004. <http://www.nixoncenter.org/publications/monographs/Sufism.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Khalid, Adeeb. "Chapter 5: The Revival of Islam [pp. 119–122]." 2007. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Religion and the State

As defined in its constitution, Kazakhstan is a secular state that grants its citizens the right to decline religious affiliation. While the constitution provides for relative religious freedom, the Kazakhstani government has instituted or proposed various laws limiting religious practice. Religious groups are required to register with the state, and they face fines and/or suspensions if they fail to meet certain criteria. Most of the country's Muslim groups are affiliated with the Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), an organization that is closely linked to the Kazakhstani government. In 2008, the government passed legislation that imposed additional restrictions on minority, or "nontraditional," religious groups. In 2009, the legislation was overturned by the nation's Constitutional Council, which stated that the laws were "inconsistent" with the Kazakhstani constitution.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, minority religious groups, such as evangelical Christian organizations and Islamic groups that remain unaffiliated with the SAMK, continue to be targeted by the government for special monitoring and control.¹⁴⁶ Kazakhstan's colonial history, during which the conversion of native peoples to Orthodox Christianity meant assuming a Russian identity and name, may predispose authorities to view newer faiths as subversive.¹⁴⁷

The government's restrictions on religion, which have drawn criticism in the West, represent continuity with the Soviet era, when organized religion posed a means to challenge state authority and was therefore subject to official control.¹⁴⁸ The Kazakhstani government has attempted to maintain the Soviet-era branding of religion as tradition rather than faith, a distinction that ostensibly serves to reduce fundamentalist fervor while respecting religious culture. Politically, the government has routinely defended its regulation of religious activity by claiming the need to deter religious extremism and ethnic conflict. It has banned the existence of political groups based on either religion or ethnicity, and it has made efforts to equally recognize the interests of its Muslim Kazakh and Christian Slavic constituencies.¹⁴⁹ Accordingly, it is the only country in Central Asia that does not give special significance to Islam in its constitution.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ The Washington Times. Duin, Julia. "Kazakhstan Backs Off on Religion Limits." 13 February 2009.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/feb/13/kazakhstan-reverses-law-to-restrict-minority-relig/>

¹⁴⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. 2008 Report on International Religious Freedom. "Kazakhstan." 19 September 2008.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108501.htm>

¹⁴⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Sharipzhan, Merhat. "Religious Intolerance Persists in Central Asia, Despite What Constitutions Say." 11 March 2009.

http://www.rferl.org/content/No_Matter_What_The_Constitutions_Say_Religious_Intolerance_Persists_In_Central_Asia/1508070.html

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch. "An Atmosphere of Quiet Repression: Freedom of Religion, Assembly and Expression in Kazakhstan." December 2008.

http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/kazakhstan1208web_0.pdf

¹⁴⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. 2008 Report on International Religious Freedom. "Kazakhstan." 19 September 2008.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108501.htm>

¹⁵⁰ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. "Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakhstan Institutions: Religions and Society [pp. 219–220]." 2005. ABC-CLIO.

Religion and Daily Life

Islamic laws and customs traditionally shape the everyday lives of practicing Muslims. These include the performance of ritual prayers five times per day and abstinence from alcohol and pork products. Strict and regular observance of these practices is not widespread among Kazakhs, most of whom do not perform the five daily prayers. The Kazakhs' informal interpretation of Islam has been attributed, in part, to a rejection of the religion as an abstract ideal. In other words, Islam is often viewed as a social practice or tradition rather than a fundamental reality. Thus, many believe that as long as some members of the community fulfill the faith's ritual obligations, the rest are exempted from devout observance.¹⁵¹

A practical example illustrates the manner in which Islam is observed today in Kazakhstan. Visiting a city mosque on Friday, the most important day of prayer for Muslims, a scholar noted the continuous flow of people moving in and out of the building. They did not enter the main room of the mosque, where group prayer is traditionally performed, but instead proceeded to a smaller room designated for Quranic studies. Once a sizable crowd had assembled, a mullah read a passage from the Quran. At the conclusion, the worshippers left a donation, which, according to custom, entitled them to a favor from Allah. They then left in order to make room for the next group.



This behavior has little in common with the traditional Friday prayer that is observed in devout Muslim societies. It is thought to be the urban equivalent of visiting a Sufi shrine to hear a shrine guard (*shiraqshi*) recite from the Quran. (Such practice is necessary, as most Kazakhs cannot speak Arabic and thus cannot read from the Quran.) In this form, the recitation is not a prayer to Allah but a call to ancestral spirits (*aruaq*), and the monetary donation serves as a payment for their assistance.¹⁵²

Orthodox interpretations of Islam have thus far failed to take root in Kazakhstan. This is due in part to government restrictions on proselytization and extremism, as well as the Kazakhs' retention of indigenous beliefs and Russian cultural norms, which include eating pork and consuming alcohol.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Khalid, Adeb. "Chapter 5: The Revival of Islam [p. 121]." 2007. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁵² *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe*. Jessa, Pawel. "Religious Renewal in Kazakhstan: Redefining 'Unofficial Islam' [pp. 171–172]." Chris Hann, et al, Eds. 2006. Berlin: Lit Verlag.

¹⁵³ *Kazakhstan: Unfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 6: A Divided Society [p. 207]." 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Religious Holidays

Orazai (Ramadan)

Ramadan is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic calendar. This period is an opportunity for devout Muslims to demonstrate their piety and devotion to Allah. Observant Muslims—with the exception of the young, the elderly, the sick, and pregnant or nursing women—are expected to fast during daylight hours for the entire month. While the fast is meant to purify the body and the soul, Ramadan is also a time for other types of spiritual rejuvenation, including intensive worship, Quranic study, and the performance of good deeds. Before the end of Ramadan, Muslims traditionally provide a portion of their income to the poor or needy. While very few Kazakhs fast, those who do prepare elaborate meals after sunset. During Ramadan, visitors to certain areas of southern Kazakhstan, where the country's devout Muslims are concentrated, should avoid consuming food in public during daylight hours.

Uraza Bairam (Eid Al-Fidr)

This festival marks the end of the Ramadan fast; it is a day of celebration, even for Kazakhs who did not participate in the fast. Elaborate food preparations are undertaken well in advance. On the day that the fast is broken, Kazakhs put on their best clothing. They open their doors to friends and family, who visit without invitation to share the feasts that were specially prepared for that day. Non-Muslims are welcome to join in the festivities, and wealthy families are expected to hold public feasts.



Qurban Ait (Eid Al-Adha)

Qurban Ait, or the Festival of Sacrifice, occurs in the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The Kazakhstani government designated it as a public holiday in 2006. The festival commemorates the story of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in obedience to Allah. According to the Quran, Allah allowed him to sacrifice a ram instead. At the start of the festivities, which may last three or four days, communities gather at a mosque and commence the holiday with a prayer. At home, they slaughter an animal, usually a sheep or goat (never poultry), for a family feast. Two thirds of the meat is traditionally given to those in need, such as orphans and elderly with no descendants. During this time, Kazakhs ask family members and friends whom they might have offended for forgiveness. They also exchange gifts and visit the graves of their ancestors. Non-Muslims may be welcomed to share in the feasting.

Mosque Etiquette

Functional mosques traditionally do not allow non-Muslims to enter. Some mosques may restrict women from entering altogether. Visitors should ask permission before entering a working mosque.

Exchange 1: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	meshtik krogee bola ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

When entering a mosque it is important to maintain a solemn and respectful demeanor so as not to disturb worshippers. Shoes must be removed.

Exchange 2: Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	meyn meshting ishindeh aayaq keemimdee sheeshoom kerek peh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Long pants and shirts are required for men. Women should wear loose-fitting clothing that covers their arms and legs; they should also cover their heads with a shawl.

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	meyn baasimda baaskeemeyn djabooyim kerek peh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

It is important not to walk in front of worshippers; such behavior is thought to invalidate their prayers.

Exchange 4: When do you pray?

Soldier:	When do you pray?	sizder qashan seenasizdar?
Local:	We pray at noon.	biz, besin keezindee seenamz

Chapter 3 Traditions

Introduction

In the past, the Kazakhs practiced a nomadic pastoral lifestyle, which championed clan solidarity amid volatile environmental conditions and external threats. The lengthy Russian and subsequent Soviet administration of the steppe oversaw the decline of the nomadic pastoral lifestyle and its replacement with one based on sedentary agriculture and industry. While Kazakhstani society remains deeply marked by Russian culture, Kazakhs retain a strong sense of their tribal heritage. Indeed, Kazakh cultural identity has resurged since the final years of the Soviet era, in large part due to the political ascendancy of ethnic Kazakhs. Led by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Kazakhstani government has pushed various pro-Kazakh reforms, such as those promoting the Kazakh language. Today, many elements of traditional Kazakh culture—including food, clothing, and clan identity—remain prominent in both daily and ceremonial life. These traditions often exist in modified forms that reflect modern social practices and structures. In addition, the Russian language remains a symbol of education and upward mobility, illustrating a continuing Russian and Soviet influence.¹⁵⁴



Tribal and Clan Identity

Within the Kazakh community, identification with one of the three Kazakh hordes, or tribal unions, remains an important part of social identity. According to Kazakh legend, the foundation of the three hordes, or *juz* (*zhuz*), can be traced to the three sons of Alash, the mythical forefather of the Kazakhs. Historically, the three hordes emerged within the Kazakh Khanate sometime during the 16th century. Likely formed for purposes of political and military organization, each horde corresponds with a specific geographic region of the country. The Lesser Horde traditionally roamed western Kazakhstan, the Middle Horde controlled the central, northern, and northeastern portions of the region, and the Great Horde occupied the south and southeast.¹⁵⁵ Today, these divisions roughly correspond with the three dialects of the Kazakh language: western, northeastern, and southern Kazakh.¹⁵⁶

Most Kazakhs continue to trace their heritage to one of the three hordes, which are further divided into tribes and clans. It is customary for Kazakhs to possess extensive knowledge of their family lineage, which is traced on the male side. A Kazakh proverb encapsulates this tradition: “He is a fool who has forgotten what became of his ancestry

¹⁵⁴ Saint Anselm College, The New Hampshire Institute of Politics. Nauruzbayeva, Zhanara. “Paradoxes of Kazakh Language ‘Revival’ in Kazakhstan.” 2002. <http://www.anselm.edu/NR/rdonlyres/FC460641-E210-4AC7-9401-E470E25B9FAC/1262/20024.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 4, 10–14].” 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

¹⁵⁶ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakhstan Society and Social Issues: Ethnicity and Social System: Ethnic Groups [p. 232].” 2005. ABC-CLIO.

seven generations before him and who does not care what will become of his progeny seven generations after him.” Many Kazakhs may not know such information, however, particularly after the social unrest and large-scale loss of life during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁵⁷

Clan relations play an important role in social networking, particularly in politics and business. They can be a major factor in securing employment; it is customary for kinship groups to support and provide for their own.¹⁵⁸ The most prominent example of this is the case of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose family members—through either blood or marriage—have dominated Kazakhstan’s government, media, and most economic sectors throughout the independent era. Nazarbayev is a member of the Great Horde, and he maintains connections with the Middle Horde through marriage.¹⁵⁹

Gender Roles and Relations

Traditionally, women played a strong role in nomadic Kazakh society, making the family’s clothing and preparing the meals under difficult conditions. These responsibilities empowered them with decision-making authority within the household. After Kazakhstan became part of the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R), gender equality was promoted according to the notion that both sexes should contribute to society’s economic production outside of the domestic sphere. Yet job placement was not gender blind. Women were overwhelmingly assigned to professions such as health care and education, which were deemed “suitable” for females according to Slavic social norms. They were also recruited into the government and party hierarchy, attaining high-level positions within the Soviet Union’s vast political and economic administrative apparatus.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Kazakh bride on horseback, ca. 1914

The practice of assigning jobs was abandoned after independence. Instead, as part of the official effort to create a Kazakh national identity, the traditional household division of labor in which men are the primary bread-winner while women are relegated to the domestic sphere was heavily promoted by the government. Yet the deteriorating economic situation did not allow many families to get by on a single income. This put stress on both men and women as circumstances forced them to live contrary to the new ideal.¹⁶⁰ Even elderly women, who no longer receive state pensions, have had to create

¹⁵⁷ *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 6: A Divided Society: Intra-Ethnic Relations [pp. 183–189].” 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁵⁸ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakh Society and Contemporary Issues: Social System [pp. 235–236].” 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁵⁹ *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 6: A Divided Society: Intra-Ethnic Relations [pp. 183–189].” 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁶⁰ Asian Development Bank. *Country Gender Assessment: Republic of Kazakhstan*. “Chapter 2: Gender Dimensions of Poverty [pp. 8–11].” May 2006. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Country-Gender-Assessments/cga-kaz.pdf>

sideline businesses, such as bread baking, to help make household ends meet, or “see the sun” (*kun koru*) as Kazakhs say.¹⁶¹

Women continue to be disproportionately represented in lower paying social and service sector jobs. Only a small percentage of management positions are held by women, largely due to the perception that men are better decision-makers. Women are also regularly passed over in the workplace for promotion due to their child-bearing and rearing responsibilities. This trend intensified after the loss of Soviet social services that included day-care facilities.¹⁶² Overall, many Kazakhstani women have expressed a sense of disempowerment in the independent era. This extends to governmental representation—only 12.9% of the nation’s parliamentary seats were held by women in 2009.¹⁶³

Traditional Economy

Until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Kazakhs practiced a nomadic pastoral lifestyle, in which tribal communities migrated seasonally with their livestock. The annual migratory cycle included a long stay at a winter campsite, a slow spring trek to summer pastures, and a quick fall descent back down to the winter site.



© ianellickr.com
Camels near Almaty

Sheep and goats were the most common livestock, followed by horses and, in semi-desert and desert areas, camels. Cattle, which require larger amounts of grass, were incorporated in the 18th century. Livestock holdings, meat, dairy, leather, and other animal products provided the basis of the economy. Limited grain stores were collected or acquired through trade or attacks on agricultural settlements. Overall, wealth was determined by the size of one’s herd; tribes held common law grazing rights to certain lands but did not own them. While the Kazakh livelihood was precariously contingent upon environmental conditions, their lifestyle was well-suited to the vast, arid steppes of the region.¹⁶⁴

During the Russian colonial era, settled farming increased the land’s carrying capacity, enabling the population to expand. After the establishment of the U.S.S.R., family farms were collectivized and industrial off-farm jobs were created. While animal husbandry remains vital to the country’s agricultural sector, the Kazakh nomadic lifestyle is, for the most part, a historical relic.

¹⁶¹ The National Council for Eurasian and Eastern European Research. Werner, Cynthia. “A Profile of Life in Rural Kazakhstan, 1994-1998: Comments and Suggestions for Further Research.” [p. 12]. 2000.

http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2000_815-17g_Werner.pdf

¹⁶² Asian Development Bank. *Country Gender Assessment: Republic of Kazakhstan*. “Chapter 5: Gender Dimensions of Economic Development [pp. 27–28].” May 2006.

<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Country-Gender-Assessments/cga-kaz.pdf>

¹⁶³ UNdata. “Country Profile: Kazakhstan.” 2009.

<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?cname=Kazakhstan>

¹⁶⁴ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 16–18].” 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

Greetings and Communication

Reflecting the importance of livestock in Kazakh nomadic society, the traditional Kazakh greeting was “Are your livestock and your soul still healthy?”¹⁶⁵ Today, manners of greeting vary according to relationship, gender, and religious affiliation. Introductions and official business meetings involve formal greetings.

Men typically greet each other with a handshake using both hands and a smile. Eye contact should be maintained during the greeting.

Exchange 5: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	qaayarleh tang
Local:	Good morning.	qaayarleh tang

Hugs may be exchanged between close friends.

Exchange 6: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	qalyngiz qalay?
Local:	Fine, very well.	djakseh, oeteh djakseh

Women may greet each other with a similar handshake or a nod. If they are good friends or family members, they may lightly hug or kiss each other on the cheek.

Exchange 7: Good afternoon.

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	qaayarleh kUhn
Local:	Good afternoon.	qaayarleh kUhn

Men may greet women with a handshake unless either of them is a devout Muslim, in which case religious custom prohibits them from touching. Men should wait for women to initiate the handshake. Women should not be offended by men who do not shake their hand, as this may often be the case. Light hugs or kisses on the cheek may be shared between good friends or family members.¹⁶⁶



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Kazakh men greeting each other

Exchange 8: Good evening.

Soldier:	Good evening.	qaayerleh keysh.
Local:	Good evening.	qaayerleh keysh.

Kazakhstani society is deeply hierarchical, with utmost respect given to elders. When meeting a group of people, the elders or group leaders should be acknowledged first, using their appropriate title, if known. Visitors should generally wait to be introduced,

¹⁶⁵ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. “Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [p. 20].” 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

¹⁶⁶ Culture Crossing. “Kazakhstan: Basics: Greetings.” No date.

http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=106

and they should not greet or address a person by his or her first name unless invited to do so.

Exchange 9: Hi, Mr. Abayav.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Abayav.	salem, mirzaa abaayip
Local:	Hello!	salaamatsing ba!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	seeyening djagdaayng djakseh ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

It is generally acceptable to inquire about the well-being of an acquaintance’s family.

Exchange 10: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	seeyening otbasingning djaghday galaay?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	olarding djaghday djaqseh, raKhmet

At the close of a meeting, handshakes are exchanged upon departure.¹⁶⁷

Exchange 11: Good night.

Soldier:	Good night.	qaayerleh tUhn.
Local:	Good night.	qaayerleh tUhn.

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

For Kazakhs, generous hospitality is a cultural tradition and a matter of great pride. Invitations for tea or dinner at a person’s home are commonly extended to visitors. In such cases, visitors will likely receive the best the host has to offer. As a sign of respect, guests should wear nice, conservative clothing to a host’s home. They will likely need to remove their shoes upon entering the household; slippers may be provided by the host. It is respectful for guests to bring a small gift for the hostess or the host’s children; sweets, pastries, fruit, flowers, or novelty items (for the kids) are appropriate. Gifts should not be excessive, as it is the host’s honor to provide for the guest, rather than vice versa.¹⁶⁸

Exchange 12: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	manaaw seeleq arnaay sizgeh
Local:	I cannot accept this.	meyn munu qabaylday almayman

While the consumption of alcohol is common in Kazakhstan, devout Muslims abstain from it and should not be offered it as a gift. Gifts are generally opened in front of guests.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Kwintessential. “Kazakhstan: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette.” No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kazakhstan.html>

¹⁶⁸ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. “Food and Drink: Habits and Customs [pp. 78–79].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

¹⁶⁹ Kwintessential. “Kazakhstan: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette.” No date. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kazakhstan.html>

Eating and Drinking Habits

Tea and Bread

A basic form of hospitality is the sharing of tea and bread. Tea (*shay*), usually black or green, is typically served in a small cup or bowl. The host will usually pour the cup only half full (or less), which allows for repeated refills of hot tea. This gesture is essentially an invitation to enjoy each other's company in a relaxed manner. If the host fills the cup full, it is a sign that the guest should soon leave. Black tea is typically served with milk or cream, while green tea is usually served straight. Guests should accept the tea with their right hand, as the left hand is generally associated with matters of personal hygiene and considered unclean; this is particularly the case if the host is a devout Muslim. If the tea is uncomfortably hot, guests should swirl it in the cup rather than blow on it.¹⁷⁰



© Dian Nevil
Lepicshka bread

Bread has special significance in Central Asia and it should be received with respect. It may be offered with tea or even provided in passing to those guests that do not have time for an extended visit. Unfinished bread should be left on the table or dining cloth rather than thrown away.¹⁷¹

Meals

Meals at a Kazakh's home are generally lengthy social affairs. Prior to eating, guests are usually given the opportunity to wash their hands, as portions of the meal may be eaten without utensils. Guests should wait to be seated by the host; seating positions are generally determined by the family hierarchy. The dining space is known as the *dastarkhan* (this term may also refer to the meal that is presented). It traditionally consists of a large cloth spread out on the floor. These may still be used in rural areas. Guests should be careful not to step on the cloth or in front of anyone who is already seated. They should also avoid pointing the soles of their feet at others while sitting down. In many homes, the meal will likely occur at a low table rather than on the floor.¹⁷²

Some hosts may say a short prayer before the meal. Thereafter, dining usually begins with tea, bread, fruits, nuts, sweets, and other snacks. *Kumys*, or fermented mare's milk, may also be served at this time; it is a traditional favorite of the Kazakhs. While table manners are somewhat informal, Kazakhs usually eat with a fork in the left hand and a knife in the right hand, although some items may be eaten by hand. Depending upon the circumstances, guests may be served by the host or they may serve themselves from communal plates.

¹⁷⁰ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Food and Drink: Tea Etiquette [pp. 76]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

¹⁷¹ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Food and Drink: Habits and Customs [pp. 78–79]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

¹⁷² *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Food and Drink: Habits and Customs [pp. 78–79]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

Exchange 13: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	manaaw taghaam qalaay atalnat?
Local:	This is khuyrdakh	bool qoordağ

Boiled sheep heads are traditionally presented to honored guests as delicacies. In these cases, the guest customarily carves the meat and distributes it to the family members according to their position in the family hierarchy. For example, ears are traditionally given to the youngest children to make them more attentive to their parents' commands, and eyes are given to the honored guest's closest friends so that they will look after him.¹⁷³ The guest and the elders will receive the best parts of the animal, such as the right cheek or the pelvic bones.¹⁷⁴



© Alexander Husch
Kazakh men eating

Elders will traditionally lead the conversation at the table. Guests will be expected to eat heartily, and their plate will be refilled by the host when left empty. When full, guests should leave a portion of food on their plate to indicate that they are satisfied. Similarly, bowls used for tea or broth should be turned over.¹⁷⁵

Guests should compliment the host for the quality of the food.

Exchange 14: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	manaaw taghaam sonday djaksee yeken
Local:	It's palaw	bool palaaw

It is appropriate to repeat such compliments during the meal as a sign of respect for the host.

Exchange 15: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	tamaaq dameh sonday djaqseh
Local:	Thank you.	aas bolsin

Depending upon the host, alcohol, such as vodka or *kumys*, may be served and celebrated with frequent toasts.¹⁷⁶ Tea is often served again after eating, and the host may say another prayer to end the meal. Before leaving, guests should thank the hosts for their hospitality.

¹⁷³ Kwintessential. "Kazakhstan: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette." No date.

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kazakhstan.html>

¹⁷⁴ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Food and Drink: Habits and Customs [pp. 78–79]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

¹⁷⁵ Kwintessential. "Kazakhstan: Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette." No date.

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/kazakhstan.html>

¹⁷⁶ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. "Food and Drink [p. 76]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

Exchange 16: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	meyn, shnameyn sizding qonaqjalay yekyeningizda baghalaaymin
Local:	It is nothing.	oqaaso djoq

Cuisine

With a heavy emphasis on animal products, Kazakh cuisine reflects the traditional nomadic pastoral lifestyle. Meat is the basis for most meals; vegetarianism is rarely practiced in Kazakhstan. Favorite meats include mutton (sheep), beef, and, especially, horse. Made from all parts of the body, horse meat specialties include *kazy* and *shuzhuk* (smoked seasoned sausage encased in intestines), *zhaya* (smoked and boiled hip meat), and *zhal* (smoked and boiled neck fat).¹⁷⁷ *Kazy* is occasionally sliced and served with cold noodles in a dish called *naryn*.



The most well-known dish in Kazakhstan is *beszbarmak*, or “five fingers.”¹⁷⁸ Eaten by hand, *beszbarmak* consists of boiled chunks of horse meat or mutton served with onions and pieces of boiled pasta dough. The broth (*sorpa*) from the boiling process is consumed after the meat portion of the meal. *Kuurdak* is another popular meal; it is a stew-like dish made from the fat and organs (i.e., heart, liver, kidneys, etc.) of sheep, horse, or cow.¹⁷⁹ *Manti* are meat dumplings, often made with lamb. *Shashlyk* (kebabs) is another common meat-based dish; it is associated with Russian cuisine, which is common in urban centers and the north.¹⁸⁰

Aside from red meats, Kazakhs also eat chicken and fish, such as pike, sturgeon, and salmon. Caviar is served as a delicacy. Found throughout Central Asia, *palaw* (*plov*), or pilaf, is a common rice dish combining vegetables, meat, and other ingredients.

Exchange 17: What ingredients are used to make palaw?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make palaw?	palaawding quraamin yeden trudeh?
Local:	Filet of lamb onions, carrot and corn oil, rice, water, garlic.	toqtuning beldeemee yeteh, peeyaaz, saabiz djaneh suyeeq maay, kUhrish, soo, saarimsaq

Sorpa (meat broth) and *kespe* (red meat or chicken with noodles) are common soups. Flat breads, such as *lepeshka*, are typically paired with meals. Similar to doughnuts, *boursaki*

¹⁷⁷ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Food: Meat [pp. 113–114].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

¹⁷⁸ The New York Times. Greenberg, Ilan. “Almaty.” 18 September 2006.

<http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/business/businessspecial2/18almaty.html>

¹⁷⁹ *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. “Kazakhstan: Food and Drink [p. 93].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

¹⁸⁰ Food in Every Country. “Food in Kazakhstan.” No date. <http://www.foodbycountry.com/Kazakhstan-to-South-Africa/Kazakhstan.html>

is a popular snack that may also accompany meals. Animal products such as cheese, yogurt, curd, sour cream, and butter are widely consumed. Likewise, many Kazakh drinks are dairy-based. *Kumys* is popular, as is *shubat*, fermented camel’s milk. Tea, milk, fruit juices, coffee, and vodka are also common beverages.¹⁸¹

Dress Codes

In urban areas, modern styles of clothing are worn by both sexes. Residents of remote rural villages may wear traditional Kazakh clothing, but it is largely reserved for special occasions and cultural festivals. For men, a characteristic item is the *chapan* (*shapan*), a long, woolen robe tied with a sash. Traditionally, Kazakh men wore the *chapan* over a loose shirt, jacket, and trousers, with tall leather boots and elaborate headwear. Reflecting the Kazakhs’ traditional pastoral economy, these items were made from wool, camel hair, leather, fur, and goat or antelope hides.¹⁸² Today, ceremonial *chapan* are often richly embroidered and made from velvet. Many Kazakhs wear garments that are suggestive of traditional dress, such as felt hats and fur-lined coats. For men, this may also include knee-length boots.¹⁸³

For Kazakh women, traditional clothing consists of a long, sleeveless jacket or vest worn over flowing dresses made of cotton, silk, or velvet. A *beldemshe*, or wrap-around skirt, may also be worn; it is usually fastened with a belt. Ceremonial dresses are typically finely embroidered and paired with jewelry. Kazakh women frequently cover their hair with a shawl or handkerchief. Various forms of headgear are also common, especially on ceremonial occasions; these include fur hats and tall, conical headpieces.¹⁸⁴ White, open-faced hoods may be worn by older Kazakh women.



Visitors to Kazakhstan should dress conservatively, particularly in the south and in rural areas. They should avoid wearing any tight or revealing clothing, such as tank tops, low-cut blouses, short skirts, or shorts.

Exchange 18: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	maaghan qalaay keenoom kerek?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	erkin, djasimday, deenengdee djaooyp tratin keyyem kee

¹⁸¹ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Food [pp. 114–120].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

¹⁸² *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. “Chapter 6: The Creative Force [pp. 216–217].” 2003. London: Stacey International.

¹⁸³ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakhstan Society and Social Issues: Ethnicity and Social System: Ethnic Groups [p. 232].” 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁸⁴ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. “Chapter 6: The Creative Force [pp. 216–217].” 2003. London: Stacey International.

It may be prudent for guests to ask a local if their attire is appropriate for the site or occasion.

Exchange 19: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	manaaw keeyugee qolaylee ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Social Events

Weddings

In Kazakh society, marriages were traditionally arranged by the families of the bride and groom. These negotiations were often made long in advance, sometimes shortly after the boy and girl to be married were born. As social contracts, the arrangements served to expand clan and familial networks rather than foster a romantic union between two individuals. Exogamy, in which persons marry outside their clan, was strictly observed. Marriages occurred at a young age, with the bride typically younger than the groom.¹⁸⁵



Today, the minimum age for marriage is 18, and Kazakhs generally choose their own partners through dating and courtship. The tradition of parental approval remains important, however, as the parents of the bride and groom customarily meet to negotiate a bride price (*kalym*) in exchange for the bride and her dowry. During the Soviet era, negotiations had to be conducted secretly, since bride wealth was viewed as evidence that the Kazakh viewed women as commodities. Traditionally, the bride price consisted of livestock; today it may include a monetary sum and/or various goods.¹⁸⁶ Gifts of jewelry and owl feathers are presented to the bride’s family to finalize the arrangement.¹⁸⁷ The dowry often consists of garments for the bride and various household items.¹⁸⁸ For girls, the prospect of marriage conjures mixed emotions. It is a rite of passage in which they become women. Yet they have been taught that leaving their home to become part of another family is a traumatic experience.

Bride kidnappings (*alyq qashu*), literally “take and run,” circumvent the familial arrangement process. This tradition is reflected in a Kazakh saying, “If they give, take from the hand, if they don’t, take from the road” (*berse qolyndan, bermese zholyndan*).¹⁸⁹ In

¹⁸⁵ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakh Society and Contemporary Issues: Social System [p. 236].” 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁸⁶ Bookrags. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*. “Marriage and Family – Central Asia.” 2001–2006. Macmillan Reference USA. <http://www.bookrags.com/research/marriage-and-familycentral-asia-ema-04/>

¹⁸⁷ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: Kazakh Society and Contemporary Issues: Social System [p. 236].” 2005. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁸⁸ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Lifestyle: Marriage Ties [p. 63].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

¹⁸⁹ Google Books. *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Pauline Jones Luong, Ed. “Chapter 6: Women, Marriage and the Nation-State: The Rise of Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan [p. 71].” 2004. Ithaca: Cornell University

some cases, the bride is an accomplice to her own abduction, which essentially serves as a form of elopement, or obtaining a quick marriage to which elders are not party. If the woman becomes pregnant, her family is spared from scandal. Some brides may literally be kidnapped, often by suitors from families who do not possess sufficient wealth to pay a bride price and are unlikely to be attractive candidates to either the young woman or her family.¹⁹⁰ In such cases, which occur primarily in rural areas in the south, the women, usually adolescent girls, may consent to the union rather than suffer the social stigma of being kidnapped. The groom’s family will then seek forgiveness from the bride’s family.¹⁹¹ With an arranged marriage, tradition obligates both sides to host a premarital in-law feast (*quadalyq*) prior to the wedding and its attendant expenses, which are the responsibility of the groom’s family. As a result, it is important for his family to schedule the ceremony as soon as possible after the two sides have reached agreement. Otherwise, they risk losing face within the community and whatever money they have invested in the union, should their son’s fiance be abducted.

Despite their Muslim heritage, Islamic custom does not always play a major role in the Kazakh wedding ceremony itself, unless the families are devout practitioners. Beforehand, the family of the bride is expected to hold a reception in honor of the impending nuptials. This reception also marks the bride’s departure from her home. The ceremony itself may involve a mixture of traditional or religious customs; it is often led by a mullah, or Muslim leader. One of the most well-known customs involved in the traditional Kazakh wedding ceremony is *betashar*, or the presentation of the bride to the groom’s family. This custom reflects the practices of the nomadic era, when it was common for the betrothed couple to meet for the first time at their wedding. A kerchief (*oramal*) is tied around the bride’s head, signaling they are now man and wife.



Exchange 20: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	sizdeh, Uhileenoo toyngizbyen qootqtaymiz!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	biz sizding qaatsqaningizgha qormeteymiz

Press.
http://books.google.com/books?id=KefvEz9bfyEC&pg=PA74&lpg=PA74&dq=bridal+scarf+central+asia&source=bl&ots=ckyv3_NEoL&sig=3K3dlftME7szyThs5s08qK-_SPI&hl=en&ei=qQCUSfCFpH2sQP77djQDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4#v=onepage&q=&f=false

¹⁹⁰ Bookrags. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*. “Marriage and Family – Central Asia.” 2001–2006. Macmillan Reference USA. <http://www.bookrags.com/research/marriage-and-familycentral-asia-ema-04/>

¹⁹¹ Department of Anthropology, Texas A&M University. “Faculty Directory: Cynthia Werner: Research Projects: Bride Kidnapping and Eloping in Southern Kazakhstan.” 18 February 2009. <http://anthropology.tamu.edu/faculty/directory.php?ID=233&LOC=1>

Either before or after the ceremony, the bride and groom meet at a public office to perform the civil registration of the union, with family members present as witnesses.¹⁹² This may occur as part of a wedding procession around town. The wedding ceremony culminates in a festive reception (*ulinenu toy*) which will represent a major expense for the groom's family.¹⁹³ These are often elaborate, expensive banquet parties that draw large numbers of guests and may last for several days.¹⁹⁴ During this time, men may wear the *chapan* while women may wear traditional dresses and headpieces. In urban areas, modern suits and dresses may be worn instead. Brides generally wear white.

Exchange 21: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	meyn sizdyergeh baaqat taleemin
Local:	We are honored.	biz Uhshin erekshee qareymet

Funerals

Kazakh funerary practices exhibit both Islamic and pre-Islamic elements. Traditionally, the body of a dead person was kept in the yurt home for three days, contrary to the Muslim practice of burying a person within 24 hours of death. Seventy-two hours is the amount of time it was assumed his soul needed to ascend to heaven. It also enabled family members time to assemble for the funeral.¹⁹⁵ Per Muslim custom, the body is washed by family members of the same sex and wrapped in a white shroud. A funeral procession carries the body to the cemetery, where the mullah performs ceremonial prayers. Women are traditionally not allowed to attend the burial ceremony, although they can visit the cemetery after the burial has occurred.¹⁹⁶



© Mental Kibarnas
Gravesyard in western Kazakhstan

Exchange 22: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	meyn sizgeh djaanyeh sizding ot baasngizgha, kongila aytaamin
Local:	Thank you.	raKhmet sizgeh

The deceased's clothes are traditionally distributed among those who helped clean and bury the body. The mourning period lasts one year, with solemn funeral gatherings traditionally held on the 3rd, 7th, and 40th days following the death. A large banquet is

¹⁹² *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 3: Habitat and Ways of Living [p. 75]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

¹⁹³ GeckoGo, Bradt Travel Guides. Brummel, Paul. "Kazakhstan: Culture." From *Kazakhstan*, 1st edition. September 2008. Bradt Travel Guides.

¹⁹⁴ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Najibullah, Farangis. "Tajikistan: President Seeks Limits on Wedding, Funeral Spending." 29 May 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1076782.html>

¹⁹⁵ Orexca.com. "Kazakh Family Traditions." No date. http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/kazakhstan_culture2.shtml

¹⁹⁶ *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. III: Family, Body, Sexuality, and Health*. Perrin-Wagner, Hélène. "Funerary Practices: Central Asia [pp. 118–119]." Suad Joseph, et al, Eds. 2006. Leiden: Brill.

held on the one year anniversary. Monuments or various stone, brick, or clay constructions may mark the grave.¹⁹⁷

Exchange 23: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	bolghan iskyeh, beyrik bolyngdar
Local:	We will try.	trsaamiz, areeneh

There are separate cemeteries for each religious group in Kazakhstan. This was true even during the Soviet era when religious expression was heavily circumscribed.¹⁹⁸

Non-Religious Holidays

Public Holidays

Many of Kazakhstan’s public holidays commemorate political events. Victory Day, observed annually on 9 May, commemorates the Soviet Union’s triumph—as part of the Allied Forces—over Germany in World War II. Until recently, Republic Day (25 October) celebrated the Kazakh Republic’s declaration of sovereignty in 1990, during the final years of the Soviet Union. It was recently removed from official observance.¹⁹⁹ Independence Day (16 December) marks the country’s official transformation to an independent state in 1991.

Observed on 30 August, Constitution Day commemorates the ratification of the country’s second constitution in 1995. The official founding of Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, is celebrated on 6 July, or Capital Day. The city was previously known as Akmola but was renamed Astana in 1998 after becoming the nation’s capital in 1997. Capital Day coincides with the birthday of the country’s president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Other public holidays include New Year’s Day (1 January), International Women’s Day (8 March), and Unity Day (1 May).²⁰⁰

Nauryz

Kazakhstan’s most celebrated holiday, however, is Nauryz, an ancient festival marking the coming of spring, or the beginning of a new year in the natural cycle. Nauryz is officially observed in Kazakhstan on 22 March, around the vernal equinox. A recent amendment to the nation’s legal code has extended the public observance of the holiday to include the 21st and 23rd.²⁰¹ The pre-Islamic tradition came to Central Asia from nearby Iran, where it is known as Nowruz, or Persian New Year. Its observance was

¹⁹⁷ Every Culture. “Kazakhs: Religion and Expressive Culture.” No date.

<http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Kazakhs-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>

¹⁹⁸ Cahiers du Monde Russe. Karklins, Rasma. “Islam: how strong is it in the Soviet Union?” 1980.

http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/cmr_0008-0160_1980_num_21_1_1374

¹⁹⁹ Kazakhstan Today. “Nazarbayev Signed Amendments to Law on Holidays.” 24 April 2009.

<http://www.kt.kz/index.php?lang=eng&uin=1133435176&chapter=1153484187>

²⁰⁰ U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Kazakhstan, U.S. Department of State. “About Us: Embassy Holiday Schedule 2009.” No date. <http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov/holidays.html>

²⁰¹ Kazakhstan Today. “Nazarbayev Signed Amendments to Law on Holidays.” 24 April 2009.

<http://www.kt.kz/index.php?lang=eng&uin=1133435176&chapter=1153484187>

prohibited in the region for much of the Soviet era—a policy that forced locals to celebrate the event privately or not at all. The festival was resurrected during the final years of the Soviet Union, when the Central Asian republics gained greater autonomy.²⁰² The Kazakhstani government has since promoted it as a celebration of national heritage and identity.



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Boy and camel during Nauryz

Rebirth is the central theme of Nauryz. The Kazakhs’ traditional nomadic lifestyle revolved around the seasonal cycle, with spring signaling the melting of the winter snows, the birth of vital livestock, and migration toward summer pastures. Today, Kazakhs mark this time of renewal by cleaning their houses, buying new clothes, and resolving their debts. Food is prepared in abundance, to be shared with guests, including the finest lamb and horsemeat dishes, as well as special yogurt soup (*kozhe*) made from seven ingredients.²⁰³ This is a Kazakh adaptation of the Persian tradition of placing seven different items on the table. Seven is the lucky number associated with Nauryz, representing the virtues of rebirth, health, happiness, prosperity, joy, patience and beauty.²⁰⁴

Exchange 24: Will you be celebrating?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating?	sizder naawrozideh meereekleelesiz beh?
Local:	Yes!	albeteh!

In southern Kazakhstan, where devout Muslims are greater in number, the holiday carries religious connotations, with the festivities carried out under the blessing of the local *imam*, or Muslim leader. He may offer a special sermon during this time. In urban areas, where the population is often ethnically diverse, the festival is usually celebrated as a secular event. In these circumstances, public parades, competitions, variety shows, food stalls, and musical and theatre performances give the festivities a carnival atmosphere.²⁰⁵

²⁰² *Central Asia*, 3rd edition. Mayhew, Bradley and Paul Clammer, Michael Kohn. “Central Asia Directory: Holidays: Navrus [p. 450].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

²⁰³ Asia Society. “Asia Society Presents Roksonaki: New Sounds From Kazakhstan.” 9 March 2008. <http://www.asiasociety.org/media/press-releases/asia-society-presents-roksonaki-new-sounds-from-kazakhstan>

²⁰⁴ Department of Anthropology, University of California. Behzadi, Einman et al. “Iranian New Year: Money Practices in the new year.” No date. http://www.anthro.uci.edu/faculty_bios/maurer/AnthroMoney/iranian.html

²⁰⁵ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Festivals [pp. 105–107].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

Do's and Don'ts

Do treat elders with the utmost respect.

Do eat and accept items with your right hand.

Do wear clean and conservative clothing.

Do refer to Kazakhs using their title and surname until they ask otherwise.

Do bring a small gift to a host's house for dinner.

Do keep the soles of your feet flat on the ground when sitting.

Don't use your left hand to eat with or pass items to others.

Don't initiate handshakes with devout Muslims of the opposite sex.

Chapter 4 Urban Life

Introduction

Kazakhstan's urban centers are largely a product of Russian and Soviet development. During the colonial era, when Russians established military outposts and settlements in the region, most of the native population lived as nomads or in small agricultural or trading communities. The Soviet Union's (U.S.S.R) subsequent industrialization of the region led to the rapid growth of urban areas, as large numbers of migrant workers—many of them originating abroad—coalesced around industrial centers.²⁰⁶ Today, approximately 58% of the population resides in urban areas, where Kazakhs often form a minority within ethnically diverse or Slavic-dominated populations.²⁰⁷



© Paul Owen
Market in Kazakhstan

Founded as a Russian military outpost in 1854, Almaty is the commercial center and former capital of Kazakhstan; it is the country's largest city. Its architecture and organized layout, including wide, tree-lined streets, are legacies of Soviet planning.^{208, 209} While ethnically diverse, Almaty's population remains dominated by Russians and other Slavs (i.e., Ukrainians and Belarusians). When Kazakhstan was a republic of the U.S.S.R., Russians formed the majority ethnic group and the elite social and political class in the region. Their status changed as the Soviet Union deteriorated and Kazakhstan become an independent country. Following a trend that began in the late 1980s, large numbers of Russians and other non-Kazakhs left the country as ethnic Kazakhs consolidated power. Those who remained have since faced marginalization amid the official promotion of Kazakh language and culture.²¹⁰

Whereas Almaty and many other Kazakhstani cities retain a Russian character, the city of Astana has been largely developed in the independent era. Formerly known as Akmola, it was a provincial railroad town until President Nursultan Nazarbayev selected it, in 1994, as the site of the new Kazakhstani capital. The government invested billions of dollars in the city, which officially became the capital in 1997 and assumed the Kazakh name of Astana ("capital") in 1998. Employing world-class architects, the city's development into a modern, high-tech capital is ongoing. The city is a Kazakh creation meant to unite the

²⁰⁶ *Kazakhstan* (Cultures of the World). Pang, Guek-Cheng. "Geography: Major Cities and Towns [p. 15]." 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

²⁰⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Kazakhstan." 12 August 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>

²⁰⁸ Global Security. Pike, John. "Almaty Airport." 19 February 2009. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/almaty.htm>

²⁰⁹ Architecture Scotland. Stallan, Paul. "The Travels of Comrade Stallan." 25 June 2009. http://www.architecturescotland.co.uk/features/265/The_travels_of_Comrade_Stallan.html

²¹⁰ Slate. Hayden, Jessica. "Dispatch from Kazakhstan: Who am I? Russian Identity in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan." 20 July 2004. <http://www.slate.com/id/2103946/>

country's diverse ethnic groups and has been described as a symbol of the burgeoning Kazakhstani identity.²¹¹

Urban Housing

Economic disparities among Kazakhs are most evident in cities, where the privatization of the housing market has played a role in creating an urban middle class. Salaried professionals have access to mortgage financing, which has fed a construction boom.²¹²

Exchange 25: Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	adjetKhana qayda?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	sizding sol djaghingizdagha, ana bolmeh

At the same time, many Kazakhs struggle to earn a living in the informal sector. Most of these urban poor migrated from rural areas.²¹³ By some estimates, the number of rural-to-urban migrants exceeded two million over the course of the 1990s.²¹⁴ As these influxes overwhelmed the urban housing supply, squatter settlements formed around urban centers. For example, an estimated 4,500 informal housing units are located in the Shanyraq district of Almaty.²¹⁵



Some residents claim to be legal owners since they purchased their homes from a previous owner rather than simply building on unoccupied land without authorization. Others paid for temporary residential permits, only to be informed that these permits were worthless. In 2006, efforts to clear makeshift homes in the Shanyraq settlement as part of an urban renewal scheme precipitated violent opposition from residents. One member of the clearance team died after he was doused in gasoline and set afire.²¹⁶

Some informal housing residents are foreign nationals from surrounding countries who are subject to deportation. In the view of some observers, these migrant workers have

²¹¹ EurasiaNet.org. Lillis, Joanna. "Kazakhstan: Astana's Anniversary Celebration Serves as a Showcase for New National Identity." 7 July 2008.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav070708.shtml>

²¹² Central Asia Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program. Daly, John C.K. "Kazakhstan's Emerging Middle Class [pp. 80–81]." March 2008.

<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/0803Daly.PDF>

²¹³ UCIS, University of Pittsburgh. The National Council for Eurasian and Eastern European Research. Werner, Cynthia. "A Profile of Rural Life in Kazakhstan, 1994-1998: Comments and Suggestions for Further Research." 2000. http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2000_815-17g_Werner.pdf

²¹⁴ *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 6: A Divided Society [p. 190]." 2002. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

²¹⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Buff, Margot. "In Kazakh Settlement, Little Hope for Squatters." 7 August 2009.

http://www.rferl.org/content/In_Kazakh_Settlement_Little_Hope_For_Squatters/1794763.html

²¹⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. "Kazakhstan." 6 March 2007.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78820.htm>

been blamed, unfairly, for the country's social problems in order to deflect attention from domestic issues.²¹⁷ Periodic deportations seem unlikely to change the situation. Kazakhstan's growing wealth has increased the need for cheap labor in sectors such as construction. As a result, it will likely remain an attractive destination for migrant workers from poorer neighboring countries, particularly Uzbekistan.²¹⁸

Health Care

The privatization of the Soviet health care system has best served those who are able to pay for good quality care. Primary, outpatient care has suffered since it does not generate as much revenue as hospitalization. Health care services are substandard compared to those available in the U.S.



Exchange 26: Is Dr. Abaiyev here?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Abaiyev here?	mirzaa doktor abaayip bar ma?
Local:	No.	djoq

HIV/AIDS has become a health threat in Kazakhstan, primarily as a result of high levels of intravenous drug use.²¹⁹ (Kazakhstan lies between a major heroin producer, Afghanistan, and a major market, Russia.) In addition to the dismantling of the Soviet public health care system, which nominally offered free care to everyone, low rates of condom use and the stigma associated with the disease have contributed to its spread.

Exchange 27: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	siz nyeh bolghan bileysiz beh?
Local:	No.	djoq

There have also been numerous cases in which HIV has been passed to children through unsanitary blood transfusions, some of which may have been medically unnecessary but performed anyway in order to generate revenue for hospitals.²²⁰

Transportation

A substantial increase in the number of privately owned automobiles has created gridlock in city streets, especially in Almaty. Among urban Kazakhs it is a sign of progress that provokes mixed feelings, including both pride and annoyance.

²¹⁷ The Jamestown Foundation. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, No. 223. Marat, Erica. "Fearing Color Revolutions are Contagious, Kazakhstan Shuts Border with Kyrgyzstan." 1 December 2005. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31162

²¹⁸ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. "Central Asia: Labor Migrants Face Abuse, Xenophobia." 22 October 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1078995.html>

²¹⁹ The World Bank. "HIV/AIDS in Kazakhstan." No date. <http://go.worldbank.org/R0VREM5EL0>

²²⁰ Center for European and Eurasian Studies, UCLA. Soehendro, Margaretta. "South Kazakhstan Outbreak Led to Anti-HIV Programs." 28 October 2008. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=99736>

Exchange 28: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	qay djol ayroportqa baradeh?
Local:	The road heading east.	shyghysqa qaray baraatn djol

Fashionable imports are replacing Soviet-era vehicles. In the words of one observer, “From Ladas to BMWs, Kazakhstan is quickly shifting gears out of the Soviet era and into the modern world.”²²¹



Exchange 29: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	djaaqin aradaa, benzeen quyaatin stanziya bar ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, bar

While many car owners use their vehicles as a form of personal transportation, gypsy cabs are common, and drivers often take advantage of unsuspecting tourists or other visitors. Therefore, it is advisable to use only licensed cabs that have meters.

Exchange 30: Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	takseede qaydan uystawogha bolada?
Local:	Over there.	anaaw djerden

Airport “meet and greet” tours have been known to drive first-time visitors to a remote locale and demand additional payment to reach the agreed-upon destination.²²²

Exchange 31: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	siz meena ana djergeh aalip baraasiz ba?
Local:	Yes, I can.	iyaa, areneh

Car rental is an option in Kazakhstan, although international visitors will need to hire a driver as well. Rental car agencies supply both.

Exchange 32: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	masheenany, qay djerdee djaalgha aloogha boladeh?
Local:	Downtown.	iskeerlik ortaligta

The diversity in car makes and models has created an auto parts market and a need for specialized mechanic services.

²²¹ The Yale Globalist. “Spot the Lada.” 29 December 2007.

<http://tyglobalist.org/index.php/2007122946/Features/Spot-the-Lada.html>

²²² Travel.State.Gov. Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department. “Kazakhstan: Country Specific Information.” 16 March 2009. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1150.html

Exchange 33: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	djaaqin djerdee, djaaqsee aftomeKhanik bar ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, bar

Kazakhstan is the ninth-largest country in the world. Its rail network is not comprehensive, and thus passengers are often required to take a circuitous route to their destination.

Exchange 34: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	djaqyn aradaa teemur djol vogzala bar ma?
Local:	No.	djoq

The train is a slow means of travel, although one that allows a glimpse into Kazakh life.²²³ Buses serve both city and long-distance routes. However, many are overcrowded and in poor condition.

Exchange 35: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	aftoboos djooq aradaa keeleh meh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa



© Michael Brown
Phone booth

Telecommunications

Cellular phone service has expanded tremendously in Kazakhstan. Wireless phones, which offer internet access and computing functions, now vastly exceed the number of land-line phones, which are a legacy of the Soviet-era state-owned telecommunication monopoly.

Exchange 36: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	sizding teleefoningizda paydalanooqha bola ma?
Local:	Sure.	areeneh

Because of the potentially lucrative nature of the telecom industry, as well as the government's restrictions on foreign investment (on grounds of national security), privatization has proved contentious.²²⁴

²²³ BootsAll Travel. Lunn, Helen. "Slowly Across the Steppe—Kazakhstan." No date. <http://www.bootsnall.com/articles/05-10/slowly-across-the-steppe-kazakhstan.html>

²²⁴ Central Asia: The World Affairs Blog, Foreign Policy Association. Boyd, Bonnie. "Trial Delay for Telecom Exec Mark Seidenfeld." 25 April 2007. <http://centralasia.foreignpolicyblogs.com/2007/04/25/trial-delay-for-mark-seidenfeld-telecom-executive/>

Exchange 37: What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone number?	sizding teeleefon nomiringiz qanday?
Local:	My phone number is: 346-23-45	mening teeleefon nomirim Uhshus qarqalteh jomaayush qaragh bays

Restaurants and Dining

While coffee is widely available, the most commonly served beverage in Kazakhstan is tea (*shay*); black tea is typically served with milk or cream, while green tea is usually served straight. Tearooms are a popular venue for socializing.



© Alan Corbova
Restaurant in Almaty

Exchange 38: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	meening shaay, neyh kofeh ishkim keeleydeh
Local:	Sure.	djaqseh

Kazakh breakfasts typically consist of bread, jam, and a yogurt drink.

Exchange 39: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	siz tanga asta alee deh beerip djatsiz ba?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Diners should ensure that their drinking water comes out of a sealed bottle and not the tap.

Exchange 40: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	maghaan stakan soo alugha bola ma?
Local:	Yes, right away.	iyaa, qaazir

Noodle soup (*kespe*) with radishes, peppers, and thin slices of lamb is a Kazakh specialty.²²⁵

Exchange 41: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	meening istiq sorpa ishkim keeleydeh
Local:	Sure.	djaqseh

As former nomads, Kazakhs are accustomed to meat in their daily diet. In addition to lamb, Kazakhs eat chicken, beef, camel, and, for non-observant Muslims, pork. Low fat and high in protein, horse meat—often served as sausages (*kazy*)—claims a special place in the Kazakh



© Sara Yeomans
Kazakh horsemeat dish

²²⁵ Cultural Profiles Project, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. “Kazakhstan: Eating the Kazakh Way.” 2000. <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/kazakhstan/eating.html>

culinary tradition. A guide explains, “If you are here, and don’t eat horse meat the visit is wasted.”²²⁶

Exchange 42: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	manaaw neyening yeteh?
Local:	Lamb.	qoyding

Desserts can consist of fresh fruit and nuts or pastries such as *chak-chak*, which is similar to Turkish baklava.

Exchange 43: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	sizdeh, tata taghaam bar ma?
Local:	Yes, we have chak-chak	iyaa, bizdeh chak chak bar

Tipping is not part of Kazakh culture and may even be offensive to people’s sense of hospitality. Most upscale restaurants add a service charge.

Exchange 44: Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	maghaan barleghee yesep shotimda alooma bola ma?
Local:	Yes, of course.	iyaa, areeneh

Splitting the bill is an unknown arrangement for Kazakhs. The person who is hosting the meal customarily pays for everyone.

Exchange 45: Put this all in one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all in one bill.	manaaning barlyghin beeree yesep shotqa salingiz
Local:	Okay.	djaraaydeh

Marketplace

The bazaar is the traditional marketplace in Kazakhstan. A visitor observes, “Bazaars are to Kazakhstan what Wal-Mart is to the United States.”²²⁷ Merchants, who operate individual stalls, are grouped according to specialization.



© Yuri Danilevski/wikipedia.org
Market in Shu

Exchange 46: Is the *bazaar* nearby?

Soldier:	Is the <i>bazaar</i> nearby?	djaqyn aradaa bazar bar ma?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	iyaa, ana djerdeh ong djaaqta

²²⁶ MSM.com. Indo-Asian News Service. “In Kazakhstan, They Eat, Drink and Ride Horses.” 23 October 2008. <http://lifestyle.in.msn.com/travel/article.aspx?cp-documentid=1686101>

²²⁷ AdoptionBlogs.com. “Kazakhstan Adoption Blog: Shopping at the Bazaars.” 28 February 2006. <http://kazakhstan.adoptionblogs.com/weblogs/shopping-at-the-bazaars>

Among the most famous Kazakh bazaars is the Green (*Zelyony* in Russian or *Yesil* in Kazakh) Bazaar in Almaty. The name refers to the bazaar’s green tents, where a large number of merchants hawk antiques and communist era memorabilia to foreign visitors. There are money changing kiosks at the Green Bazaar.

Exchange 47: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	siz amereekandiq aqshanee qabuldaysiz ba?
Local:	No we only accept tenge.	djoq, biz tek djergiliktee tengeeneh ghana qabuldaaymiz

As an expatriate remarked about the transition from communism, “Obtaining a bag of cement was once a serious crime, as you were usurping the building prerogative of the state. Not only can you now buy as many as you want, but the salesman will beam, and wish you ‘good building.’”²²⁸ A wide array of items—from imported fruit to auto parts—is available at large bazaars. In the winters, hours may be shortened.

Exchange 48: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	munda, qansha owaqit aleh bolas?
Local:	Three more hours.	taghay ush saghatay

For mass-produced consumer goods, many merchants have the same inventory, which is often imported from China. If one vendor is sold out, visitors should check other stalls.

Exchange 49: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	sizdeh taghay da bar ma?
Local:	No.	djoq

Traditional Kazakh clothing items, such as round fur hats, which are ubiquitous in winter, and men’s coats (*shapan*), are typically available.

Exchange 50 Do you sell *shapan*?

Soldier:	Do you sell <i>shapan</i> ?	sizdeerdeh shaapan satlaa ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Bargaining is the norm in Kazakhstan, and many merchants will have calculators to assist conversion from US dollars.

Exchange 51: Can I buy a *shapan* with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a <i>shapan</i> with this much money?	shapanda munshama aqshagha satip aloogha bola ma?
Local:	No.	djoq

²²⁸ The Independent. Dejevsky, Mary. “Almaty Stories.” 30 June 2002. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/almaty-stories-646778.html>

It is advisable to carry small bills when shopping; visitors face the prospect of overpaying if they lack correct change but would like to purchase the item nonetheless.

Exchange 52: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	maaghan, munanu uysaqtap bereesiz beh?
Local:	No.	djoq

Vendors can be aggressive and persistent in their efforts to make a sale. Visitors should not engage anyone in protracted negotiations unless they are seriously interested in buying something.

Exchange 53: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	meeneen birdeengee satip alingzshy
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	keyshir, meendeh aqsha qalmaadeh

Vendors will often accommodate a buyer’s need to ascertain size and comfort before making a purchase. If guests wish to try on traditional wool boots, for example, the merchant will likely have rubber slippers to keep the soles clean.

Exchange 54: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	maaghan, djaaqin aranaa aralap shughooma bola ma?
Local:	Sure.	areneh

Beggars

Beggars congregate in high-traffic public areas, particularly at markets, where people are likely to carry cash. Some migrate to Kazakhstan from neighboring countries on a seasonal basis because Kazakhs are believed to be generous; they are seen by some as more willing to give away change and old clothes to indigents.²²⁹

Exchange 55: Give me money

Local:	Give me money	maaghan aqsha beringzshee
Soldier:	I don’t have any.	meendee yeshqanday aqsha djoq

Giving to the poor is a personal decision. Disabled adults may lack other means to survive. Children, by contrast, may have been recruited into gangs that force them to turn over the alms they receive. Supporting child beggars may either support these gangs or encourage parents to send their children begging rather than to school.

²²⁹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. “Central Asian Roma Seeking Work in Kazakhstan.” 9 April 2009. http://www.rferl.org/content/Central_Asian_Roma_Seeking_Seasonal_Work_In_Kazakhstan/1605494.html

Chapter 5 Rural Life

Introduction

An estimated 42% of the Kazakhstani population lives in rural areas.²³⁰ These areas are sparsely populated; the entire country has, on average, only 14.5 people per square mile, compared to nearly 80 people per sq. mi in the U.S.²³¹ Kazakhs are predominant in most rural regions, particularly in the south. While the vast majority of them are no longer nomadic, many remain dependent upon animal husbandry for their livelihoods. Sedentary farming, which was not widely adopted by the Kazakhs until the Soviet era, is similarly vital to many rural households. Kazakhstan's agricultural sector is weak, however, largely due to the lingering effects of Soviet-era policies and an ongoing lack of investment. Thus, while nearly one third of Kazakhstanis depend on agriculture for a living, the sector accounts for only a small percentage of Kazakhstan's GDP.²³² As a result, rural incomes are generally low and poverty is widespread.²³³ Harsh climate conditions, long distances to city centers, and a general lack of development make life in many rural villages difficult.

The Nomadic Background

The Kazakhs were traditionally a nomadic people. Sheep, goats, and cattle were herded over long distances by members of migrating villages, for whom horses and camels were essential for transport and animal products. The Kazakhs' migratory lifestyle allowed them to take advantage of the best pasturelands according to season. Their alternating use of these grazing lands served to prevent soil degradation.²³⁴ Winter was a mostly uneventful season, except for the difficult period when the herds were moved down to a sheltered base camp. During this time, nomadic families performed essential tasks, such as making clothing and repairing gear.



© Paul Owen
Kazakh boy on a horse

²³⁰ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Kazakhstan." 12 August 2009.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>

²³¹ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. State Department. "Background Note: Kazakhstan."
April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

²³² Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Kazakhstan." 12 August 2009.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>

²³³ The World Bank. "Kazakhstan: Country Brief 2009." April 2009.
<http://go.worldbank.org/9UH84B3B70>

²³⁴ CAT.INIST. *Journal of Arid Environments*, Vol. 53, No. 3. Robinson, S., et al. "Rangeland Degradation in Kazakhstan During the Soviet Era: Re-Examining the Evidence" (Abstract). 2003.
<http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=16338772>

The Kazakhs' way of life was heavily dependent on favorable weather. While winter was spent at a lower elevation, harsh weather could cause the herds to starve, particularly if a thick layer of ice covered the grass. In the summer, animal pastures were affected by drought. The nomads dug wells along their established migratory routes, which were passed down from generation to generation. These wells could dry up if there was insufficient rainfall. While there was no formal system of ownership in place, each tribe claimed certain pasturelands for its exclusive use.²³⁵ This prevented overgrazing, an occurrence associated with the phenomenon known as the “tragedy of the commons,” in which multiple users have no individual incentive to conserve a shared resource.²³⁶



The Agricultural Development of the Steppe

Collectivization and Famine

Russian colonization of the Kazakh steppe began in the northwest in the 1600s, and gradually progressed eastward and southward over the following centuries. The sparsely populated steppe was seen by Russian settlers as a land of opportunity, similar to the way early American homesteaders viewed the vast Great Plains as they expanded westward.²³⁷ After the establishment of the U.S.S.R. in 1922, the Soviet government in Moscow initiated its economic development of the steppe according to the principles of Marxist ideology. The Soviets established collective farms (*kolkhozy*) and state farms (*sovkhozy*) in the region. This was done, in part, to address the economic inequality that they assumed existed in Kazakh society. Moreover, such reforms enabled the Soviet government to assume control over agricultural output.

Under the Soviet development scheme, the Kazakhs' private property was expropriated, or taken as property of the state, on the grounds that *kulaks* (wealthy farmers) had acquired their assets by exploiting others. The primary targets of this campaign were clan leaders (*bey* or *bii*), who generally held more assets than other community members.²³⁸ The clan structure, moreover, had proved impervious to communist party penetration.²³⁹ In reality, any Kazakh household that was slightly better off than its neighbors was at risk

²³⁵ This section taken from *Kazakhstan: Cultures of the World*. Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Chapter 6: Lifestyle [pp. 59–61].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish.

²³⁶ Overuse and depletion occurs when too many people share access to the same resource. For example, a fisherman has no incentive to throw back any of his catch to replenish the existing stock, since he knows they will simply be caught by someone else.

²³⁷ The European Courier. Rasizade, Alec. “Reclaiming the Russian North of Kazakhstan.” 27 December 2008. <http://www.europeancourier.org/151.htm>

²³⁸ Stanford's Student Journal of Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies. Ertz, Simon. “The Kazakh Catastrophe and Stalin's Order of Priorities, 1929-1933: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives.” Spring 2005. <http://zhe.stanford.edu/spring05/Kazakhstan2.pdf>

²³⁹ *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Conquest, Robert. “Chapter 9: Central Asia and the Kazakh Tragedy [p. 192].” 1987. New York: Oxford University Press.

of being vilified as capitalist. In the case of one village, an elder recalled that this applied to “those fortunate few who owned livestock—perhaps a dozen sheep or a few horses.”²⁴⁰

Nomadic herdsman and even settled farmers fiercely resisted the Soviets’ forced collectivization scheme. Many Kazakhs chose to kill their animals rather than surrender them to authorities. As many as 12 million sheep and cattle were slaughtered in 1930 alone, with millions more killed over the following years.²⁴¹ As livestock holdings declined and the collectivization program produced low crop yields, the regional population was left with little to eat. Between 1929 and 1939, one third of the Kazakh population, or more than 1.5 million people, died as a result of either hunger or violence stemming from resistance to Soviet policy.²⁴² Many other Kazakhs fled the region during this time.

Virgin Lands Campaign

Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin’s successor, initiated the ill-fated Virgin Lands Campaign in 1953–1954. The program was seen as a means to transform the Soviet Union’s supposedly unproductive steppe land, including that of the Kazakh region, into a national breadbasket.

Under this scheme, millions of hectares of northern Kazakhstan were converted to farmland. Hundreds of thousands of Slavic settlers, who were promised relocation assistance as well as land, voluntarily moved to the region from other parts of the U.S.S.R to work in the newly developed fields.²⁴³ Control over tractors was decentralized from national machine stations to collective farms to better coordinate production.²⁴⁴



The campaign initially produced several years of good harvests. However, the Soviets’ intensive single-crop cultivation and attendant disregard for soil and climate conditions soon produced disastrous consequences. Millions of tons of soil were lost to wind erosion, which reduced soil fertility and left the region prone to desertification. By 1964, the program was acknowledged as a failure and the government was forced to resort to bread rationing.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Pannier, Bruce. “Kazakhstan: The Forgotten Famine.” 28 December 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079304.html>

²⁴¹ *Central Asia: A Global Studies Handbook*. Hanks, Reuel R. “Kazakhstan: Part One: Narrative Section: The Geography and History of Kazakhstan: History: The Soviet Period [p. 176].” 2005. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

²⁴² Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University. “HURI Holds Symposium on Great Famine.” 20 October 2003. http://www.huri.harvard.edu/na/oct20_03_faminesymp.html

²⁴³ *The Former Soviet Union’s Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*. Minahan, James. “Chapter 10: The Russians and the Loss of Empire, 1986-2004: Russians in Central Asia [p. 346].” 2004. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

²⁴⁴ *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, 2nd edition. Cohen, Saul Bernard. “Chapter 8: Russia and the Eurasian Convergence Zone [pp. 223–224].” 2008. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

²⁴⁵ Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Iskra Research Publishing House. “Petro G. Grigorenko: Review of a Life and a Book.” No date. <http://www.mit.edu/people/fjk/essays/grigorenko.html>

Market Reform and Privatization

The deficiencies of state-run agriculture became increasingly evident in the 1980s as greater levels of inputs were required to achieve harvest goals. The legacy of the Soviet system continued to affect production after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. in 1991. In the early independent era, state farms were reorganized as private enterprises, but they were saddled with the debts incurred during the previous era. Managers sold the machinery that had been collectively owned, occasionally pocketing the profits and forcing farmers to rely on their own labor.²⁴⁶ While family farms were legalized and traditional communities, or *aul*, were reestablished, households lacked the resources to make up for the loss of state subsidies. This created a situation in which the prices of inputs, such as fertilizer, rose far faster than the sale price of outputs like meat and grain.²⁴⁷



Village girls, Tien Shan Mountains

As a result, food production in Kazakhstan fell by 50% over a short period of time in the 1990s. As inflation surged, farmers were required to assume additional debt to survive.²⁴⁸ Privatization was seen as a method to restore production and stabilize market prices, but it proved difficult to implement. One obstacle was the popular argument that privatization was contrary to the traditional Kazakh way of life. Land was not fully privatized until 2003. This development finally allowed farmers access to credit based on the collateral value of their privately owned land.²⁴⁹

Exchange 56: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	manaaw sizding zheykeh menshik djyeringiz beh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

The nation's primary agricultural product is still wheat; it annually produces some 14–15 million tons of the crop.²⁵⁰ Kazakhstan now ranks as the seventh-largest wheat producer in the world. Under these circumstances, Kazakhstani farmers should benefit from rising world demand, yet when the global price for wheat hit record highs in early 2008, the

²⁴⁶ Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University. *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*. Yermukanov, Marat. "Kazakhstan Launches A Program To Boost Rural Economy." 22 May 2002. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/234>

²⁴⁷ Entrepreneur. *Comparative Political Studies*. Pomfret, Richard. "Using Energy Resources to Diversify the Economy: Agricultural Price Distortions in Kazakhstan" June 2009. <http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/200783693.html>

²⁴⁸ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 3: Habitat and Ways of Living [p. 84]." 2003. London: Stacey International.

²⁴⁹ Mercatus Center, George Mason University. Wandel, Jürgen and Botagoz Kozbagarova. "Kazakhstan: Economic Transformation and Autocratic Power [p. 12]." July 2009. <http://www.mercatus.org/uploadedFiles/Mercatus/Publications/Kazakhstan%20-%20Economics%20Transformation%20and%20Autocratic%20Power.pdf>

²⁵⁰ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. State Department. "Background Note: Kazakhstan." April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5487.htm>

Kazakhstani government abruptly imposed export controls.²⁵¹ This was in response to the actions of private producers, who had prioritized exports and thereby caused domestic inflation to surge.²⁵²

Education

Under Soviet leadership, educational funding came from Moscow. After the U.S.S.R was disbanded, 80% of state-run kindergartens in Kazakhstan closed due to a lack of operating funds. New preschools opened in 1999 and funding became the responsibility of local governments, which have not been able to meet demand. As a result, some schools charge tuition. Despite the government’s emphasis on promoting the use of Kazakh, Kazakh-language pre-schools are often rated lower than their Russian language counterparts, which have reportedly attracted better teachers.²⁵³



© Andy Szul
Students in Akzhaik Village

Exchange 57: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	djaaqin djerdeh mektep bar ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, bar

While primary education is compulsory and free of charge, the quality of rural education suffers in comparison to that available in urban areas. Moreover, rural children are less likely to be enrolled than their urban counterparts, as their families may need their labor or educational facilities may be located at remote distances.²⁵⁴ Enrollment in secondary education is largely contingent upon a student’s socioeconomic background and location.²⁵⁵

Health Care

In the nomadic era, health care was traditionally provided by folk healers. Under the U.S.S.R., a state-run health care system served everyone free of charge. The bureaucratic allocation of funds to meet targets set in Moscow left managers with little flexibility to deal with local health problems, however. In the words of one health care consultant, the organizational model “was one of an inverted pyramid, heavy and bloated at the top,

²⁵¹ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Food and Agricultural Organization. “Fighting Food Inflation through Sustainable Investment.” 10 March 2008.

<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/common/ecg/1000808/en/FAOEBRD.pdf>

²⁵² Global Insight. “Wheat Prices Leap 25% as Kazakhstan Joins List of Countries Restricting Exports.” 26 February 2008. <http://globalinsight.com/SDA/SDADetail11647.htm>

²⁵³ Open Society Institute. Transitions Online. Nurmakov, Adil. “Kazakhstan: Short on Funds, Not on Ambition.” 12 August 2008.

http://www.soros.org/initiatives/esp/articles_publications/articles/kazakhstan_20080812

²⁵⁴ Millennium Development Goals in Asian and the Pacific. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. “Achieve Universal Primary Education.” July 2007.

http://www.mdgasiapacific.org/files/shared_folder/documents/fs_nca_mdg_goal2_en.pdf

²⁵⁵ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Kazakhstan: Humanitarian Country Profile.” February 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/country.aspx?CountryCode=KZ&RegionCode=ASI>

narrow and anemic at the bottom.”²⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the program was successful in preventing the spread of communicable diseases, a major priority.

Exchange 58 Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	djaaqin aradaa meydezenaliq keleneka bar ma?
Local:	Yes, over there.	iyaa, ana djerdeh

As budgets tightened in the 1980s, user fees were introduced. After independence in 1991, health care services were negatively affected by the deteriorating economic and social conditions. Communicable diseases spread virtually unchecked. By 1994, the health care budget had been cut by approximately two-thirds since the end of the Soviet era.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, much of the budget was allocated for expensive hospitalization



facilities while primary care was neglected. While the budget has increased, the health care system has only been partially rationalized through the closure of duplicative and underused facilities. There remains an over-emphasis on providing specialist care to paying patients at the expense of funding primary outpatient care for the indigent.

Exchange 59: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	mening qolim sinda, siz maaghan komektesisiz beh?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	iyaa, meyn saghan komektesyemin

Doctors earn approximately USD 130 per month. This meager salary is supplemented by bribes in exchange for timely consultations and fees to provide patient files. In one case, a hospital was found to be charging for unnecessary blood transfusions that were performed on infants using blood tainted with HIV.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Abt Associates. Brinkerhoff, Derick W. and Mark McEuen. “New NGO Partners for Health Sector Reform in Central Asia: Family Group Practice Associations in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan [p. xiii].” July 1999. http://www.abtassociates.com/reports/ES-19991056471215_15578.pdf

²⁵⁷ Regional Office for Europe, World Health Organization. European Observatory on Health Care Systems. “Health Care Systems in Transition: Kazakhstan [p. 53].” 1999. <http://www.euro.who.int/DOCUMENT/e67903.pdf>

²⁵⁸ AIDS Education Global Information System. *Chicago Tribune*. Rodriguez, Alex. “When Health Care Does More Harm than Good; Doctors Pushed Transfusions; Kids Got HIV.” 16 September 2007. <http://www.aegis.com/news/ct/2007/CT070902.html>

Transportation and Lodging

Travel across Kazakhstan's vast rural areas can be slow and difficult. Roads in rural Kazakhstan are in poor condition and often marked by deep potholes. Many drivers do not obey traffic regulations.²⁵⁹ Moreover, throughways are dotted with tax collection stations. These stations act as a disincentive to trade, as such taxes often make transporting goods to market unprofitable for many farmers.²⁶⁰



© Simon Taylor
Road in rural Kazakhstan

Exchange 60: Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	djaaqin mangda turghin uyee bar ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, bar

The government places no restrictions on home stays. Visitors can find many different types of accommodation in rural Kazakhstan, including camping, although personal security may be an issue in some places.²⁶¹

Exchange 61: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	muna adaamdar sizgeh qup tondirdee meh?
Local:	No.	djoq

Local Leadership

In the nomadic era, the power structure of the Kazakh tribal unions, or *juz*, included a khan (the *juz* leader), sultans (tribal leaders and noblemen), *bii* (clan leaders who often served as judges or mediators), *batirs* (proven warriors), and *aksakal* (communal elders).

Exchange 62: Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	sizding yel aghasy osinda traadee ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, osinda traada

²⁵⁹ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department. "Kazakhstan: Country Specific Information." 16 March 2009. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1150.html

²⁶⁰ *The Central Asian Economies Since Independence*. Pomfret, Richard. "Chapter 10: International Economic Policies: Regionalism and Integration into the World Economy [p. 209]." 2006. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁶¹ Crazy Guy on a Bike. Weir, Bill. "Kazakhstan (9-26 July 2008)." 28 October 2008. http://www.crazyguyonabike.com/doc/page/?o=3Tzut&page_id=87111&

Clan leaders and communal elders were much more influential within their community than the khan, who relied on his underlings' support to raise armies for war.²⁶²

Exchange 63: Can you take me to your leader?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your leader?	siz meyneh yel aghasina alip bara alaasiz ba?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

As a legacy of this structure, elders remain the most respected members of Kazakh communities.

Exchange 64: Respected leader we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected leader we need your help.	qadirley yel aghaasa bizgeh sizding komegingiz kerek
Local:	Yes.	djaraydeh



© Angusku/flickr.com
Village in the Tien Shan Mountains

Today, regional leaders consist of provincial government officials, including a local governor, legislative council (*maslikhat*), and police.²⁶³ Socially, communal elders retain the highest status within villages, and they traditionally take a lead role in interacting with guests and visitors.

Exchange 65: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	osy djerdu oyetyeh djaqsy bileysiz beh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Checkpoints

Identification checks are common in Kazakhstan, where law enforcement authorities are not required to demonstrate probable cause.²⁶⁴

Exchange 66: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	yeng djaaqin baqalaaw nUhkteseh qaayda?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	yeki keelomeeter dey

²⁶² *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Chapter 1: Origin of the Kazakhs and the Formation of the Kazakh Khanate [pp. 13–16]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

²⁶³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Kazakhstan." December 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Kazakhstan.pdf>

²⁶⁴ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. State Department. "Kazakhstan: Country Specific Information." 16 March 2009. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1150.html

Kazakhstani citizens are issued national identity cards. Failure to produce one when requested can result in arrest or detainment.

Exchange 67: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	sizding qudjatingiz osy ghana ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Traffic police in Kazakhstan are notorious for stopping cars and identifying some infraction for which the driver must pay a fine.²⁶⁵

Exchange 68: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	mashinadan shighingizsha
Local:	OK.	djaraaydeh

Traffic stops will include a request for the driver’s license and registration.

Exchange 69: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	bizgee mashinaning tirkeeyoo quджаatin korseytingiz
Local:	OK.	djaaqseh

While gun ownership is legal in Kazakhstan, illegal possession of firearms is also of concern to law enforcement authorities.²⁶⁶

Exchange 70: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	sizding qanday bolmasin qarooyngiz bar ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, bar

²⁶⁵ Overseas Security Advisory Council. “Kazakhstan 2008 Crime & Safety Report.” 2 April 2008. <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=82282&print>

²⁶⁶ Gunpolicy.org. BBC Worldwide Monitoring/Interfax. “Inspection of Licensed Kazakh Gun Owners Yields 747 Illegal Weapons.” 7 April 2009. http://www.gunpolicy.org/Topics/Guns_In_Central_Asia.html

Landmines

In recent years, the Kazakhstani government has issued mixed statements concerning its use (or non-use) of landmines. According to Landmine Monitor, Kazakhstani “government officials have at times acknowledged the use of landmines in border areas and at other times denied the existence of minefields in Kazakhstan.”²⁶⁷ In the event that Kazakhstan has active minefields, they are most likely located in non-residential, non-agricultural areas along the country’s extensive borders.²⁶⁸ Caution is advised in such areas.



Exchange 71: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	manaaw djyer minaalanghan ba?
Local:	No.	djoq

Kazakhstan is not a producer of landmines, although it retains a stockpile of mostly expired landmines that it inherited from the Soviet Union. It has reportedly destroyed a small portion of its stockpile in recent years. The government is not a signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty, which requires member states to destroy their entire stockpiles within 10 years of signing the agreement.²⁶⁹ The government has cited border security issues in defense of its noncompliance with the treaty.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. *Landmine Monitor Report 2007*. “Kazakhstan.” 2007.

http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2007&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=kazakhstan&pqs_section=

²⁶⁸ Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. *Landmine Monitor Report 2005*. “Kazakhstan.” 2005.

http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2005&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=kazakhstan&pqs_section=

²⁶⁹ Relief Web. International Campaign to Ban Landmines. “Hold-Out States Must Join Landmine Ban, Says Nobel Laureate.” 7 July 2009. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/NSPR-7TQD36?OpenDocument>

²⁷⁰ Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. *Landmine Monitor Report 2008*. “Kazakhstan.” 2008.

http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2008&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=kazakhstan&pqs_section=

Chapter 6 Family Life

Introduction

The nuclear family is the basic social unit in Kazakhstan. For Kazakhs, it is part of a much larger kinship network that is traced on the father's side of the family. This patrilineal network comprises three levels of affiliation beyond the nuclear family: horde (*juz* or *zhuz*), clan (*taipa* or *ru*), and patrilineage (*ru* or *ata*).²⁷¹ A family's horde affiliation refers to one of the three historical Kazakh Hordes, or tribal unions: the Great, Middle, and Lesser hordes. Clans (or tribes) represent subdivisions within the hordes, while patrilineages are kin groups within the clan that can be traced to a single male progenitor.²⁷² This network provides an extensive social support group for its members. Within the home, a family may display a clan tree, or ancestral chart, with their place within the network proudly identified.²⁷³



© AllApp/Rick.com
Kazakh family

Exchange 72: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	sizding, basqaday bawrlaringiz bar ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa, bar

Hordes, clans, and patrilineages are traditionally associated with specific geographical areas. These affiliations allow people to distinguish between insiders and outsiders.

Exchange 73: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	siz osinda too oestingiz beh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Outsiders—who will never receive social acceptance as full-fledged members of the community—are often transplants who relocate to a new area for their career.

Exchange 74: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	manaa adaamdar sizding awleten beh?
Local:	No.	djoq

According to this tradition, women may also be considered outsiders, as they customarily marry into a family from a different patrilineage.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures*. Werner, Cynthia. "Kazakhs: Cultural Overview [p. 572]." Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, Eds. 2003. New York: Springer.

²⁷² UCIS, University of Pittsburgh. The National Council for Eurasian and Eastern European Research. Werner, Cynthia. "A Profile of Rural Life in Kazakhstan, 1994-1998: Comments and Suggestions for Further Research [p. 5]." 2000. http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2000_815-17g_Werner.pdf

²⁷³ *The Kazakhs*, 2nd edition. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Preface to the Second Edition [p. xvi]." 1995. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.

Gender Roles and the Division of Labor

In the household, women are traditionally responsible for cooking, cleaning, and childcare while men earn a living (e.g., care for the family's livestock) and maintain the property. The downward mobility that most Kazakhs experienced after the U.S.S.R dissolved, when many government employees were terminated, created a need for all able-bodied members of the family to seek paid employment outside the home. The ideal arrangement for a married couple is to have one person earning a secure state salary while the other works in the informal economy, raising livestock and poultry or working at the bazaar.



© Mental Kibera
Mother and children

Exchange 75: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	sizding aulyeteh, teyk sizdeh ghana djumis bar ma?
Local:	No.	djoq

At the bazaar, men traditionally sell livestock while women sell cloth, food, and other basic commodities. Kazakhs believe that females are better suited to selling goods at the market, as they are thought to be more patient and persuasive than men.²⁷⁵ Depending upon the availability of water, families may grow cash crops as well.

Exchange 76: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	mirzaa, siz qayda djumis isteessiz?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	mirzaa, meyn ferma eeyasimin

Marriage and Divorce

In Kazakh society, marriages traditionally served to extend clan and familial relations. According to custom, Kazakh women must marry outside their lineage but not necessarily outside their clan.

Exchange 77: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	siz Uhilyenginsiz beh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Consensual bride kidnapping, in which a girl is taken away on horseback by a known suitor, was a cultural tradition among the Kazakhs.

Exchange 78: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	manaaw sizding ayingiz beh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

²⁷⁴ UCIS, University of Pittsburgh. The National Council for Eurasian and Eastern European Research. Werner, Cynthia. "A Profile of Rural Life in Kazakhstan, 1994-1998: Comments and Suggestions for Further Research [pp. 5-6]." 2000. http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/2000_815-17g_Werner.pdf

²⁷⁵ *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures*. Werner, Cynthia. "Kazakhs: Gender Roles in Economics [p. 576]." Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, Eds. 2003. New York: Springer.



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Bride and groom

Since Kazakhstan became independent in 1991, non-consensual bride kidnapping (*alyp qashu*, or, literally, “take and run”) has been on the rise. Perhaps inadvertently promoted by the government through its emphasis on restoring traditional gender roles, the practice is now typically performed by car, rather than horse.²⁷⁶ For the groom and his family, one common motive behind this practice is a desire to avoid the ever-increasing expenses associated with a wedding, including the payment of the traditional bride price (*kalym*). In other cases, the groom may feel that the girl is unlikely to consent through other means, because of a significant age difference or lack of financial security, for example. Abductions are carried out with the

knowledge that once a girl has been taken to the home of the kidnapper and adorned with a traditional marital scarf, her own family will pressure her to accept the union. This is to avoid the shameful stigma of returning home with her virginity in question, which would cast a shadow on the entire family.²⁷⁷

In any case, unmarried adults are subject to social pressure to marry, despite the possibility of divorce. In many cases, the decision to end a marriage is dictated by economics (e.g., the husband is unable to support his family). In case of divorce, the woman is generally awarded custody of the couple’s children. In recent years, Kazakhstani officials have considered legalizing polygamy, an Islamic tradition that allows men to have up to four wives. If allowed, the practice would enable wealthy men—as long as their existing wives agreed—to create more than one family, all of whom would be assured of support.²⁷⁸

Exchange 79: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	manaaw Uhideh qanshama aadam traada?
Local:	Five.	beys aadam

Status of Women

The Kazakh distinction between a girl (*qyz*) and a woman (*aiyel*) is not based on age but rather marital status. The latter refers to a female who is married and no longer a virgin.²⁷⁹ The term for daughter-in-law (*kelin*) also has a special connotation in Kazakh.

²⁷⁶ Bride kidnapping has become a regional phenomenon. The Fletcher School, Tufts University. *Praxis, The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. XVI. Handrahan, L.M. “Implications of International Human Rights Law and Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan.” 2000.

<http://fletcher.tufts.edu/praxis/archives/xvi/Handrahan.pdf>

²⁷⁷ Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Werner, Cynthia. “The Rise of Non-Consensual Bride Kidnapping in Kazakhstan: Developing a Culturally-Informed and Gender-Sensitive Response.” No date.

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1424&fuseaction=topics.publications&doc_id=8661&group_id=8378

²⁷⁸ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. “Central Asia: Kazakhstan Debates Polygamy amid Regional Rise in Popularity.” 28 May 2009. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1144507.html>

²⁷⁹ *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*. Werner, Cynthia. “Chapter 6: Women, Marriage, and the Nation-State: The Rise of Non-Consensual Bride

It literally means “incomer” and reflects the woman’s origination from a different patrilineage.

Exchange 80: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	sizding otbasingiz osinda tura ma?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

Kelin typically play a subservient role in their new families. In order to earn her place in the family, the daughter-in-law is expected to assist her in-laws, as well as other members of the family, in various services. Expectations are particularly high for the daughter-in-law if the young couple is living with the groom’s family.²⁸⁰ A wife’s primary responsibility, however, is to bear a male child. Only after she does this is her place in the family secure.²⁸¹

Children

The honor of placing a baby in a cradle for the first time is accorded to a female village elder, ideally a woman who has had many children that have survived to adulthood and started their own families. It is hoped that she can convey the same blessings to the newborn that she did to her own children.²⁸² Celebrations mark various stages of development; for boys, the circumcision ceremony is a major event.²⁸³



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Kazakh children

Traditionally, the mother served as the primary caregiver; fathers taught their sons how to care for the animals on which their nomadic livelihood depended. Since both parents in many Kazakh families need to work outside the home, children, especially teens, now spend less time with their parents.²⁸⁴ These circumstances make school an even greater influence in children’s lives. A family celebration typically marks the start of a child’s formal education, which usually occurs around age six.²⁸⁵

Kidnapping in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan [p. 60].” Pauline Jones Luong, Ed. 2004. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

²⁸⁰ *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World’s Cultures*. Werner, Cynthia. “Kazakhs: Attainment of Adulthood [p. 575].” Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, Eds. 2003. New York: Springer.

²⁸¹ *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. II: Family, Law, and Politics*. Harris, Colette. “Family Relations: Central Asia [pp. 141–142].” Suad Joseph, Ed.2005. Leiden: Brill.

²⁸² Silk Road Painting. “Rasing [sic] Children in Kazakhstan.” 2009.

http://www.kazakhcrafts.com/?id=almaty_kazakhstan_kazakstan&subid=2

²⁸³ *Kazakhstan (Cultures of the World)*. Pang, Guek-Cheng. “Festivals: The Significance of Feasts [p. 110].” 2001. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

²⁸⁴ *International Encyclopedia of Adolescence*. Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen, Ed. “Kazakhstan: Friends and Peers/Youth Culture [p. 555].” 2007. New York: Taylor and Francis Group (Routledge).

²⁸⁵ Every Culture. Johnson, Eric M. “Culture of Kazakhstan: Socialization: Child Rearing and Education.” No date. <http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Kazakhstan.html>

Exchange 81: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	sizding balalaringiz mektepkee baradama?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

The Elderly

Elders are treated with utmost respect in Kazakh society. For example, the oldest male in the household is given the right to lead the discussion at family meals.²⁸⁶ During the Soviet era, the elderly could make an economic contribution to the family, since they drew state pensions. Today, they are again dependent on their adult children for support. Traditionally, the youngest son and his wife are responsible for caring for his parents when they are too old to look after themselves.²⁸⁷



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Grandfather and grandson

Exchange 82: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	manaaw sizding barliq awletingiz beh?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

To ease the burden involved in rearing young children, Kazakhs formerly practiced a custom in which a couple would give their first-born child, particularly if it was a boy, to the child's paternal grandparents after it had been weaned. Although today children typically grow up in the home of their parents, grandparents have retained their customary care-giving role. Moreover, Kazakhs often become observant Muslims in their old age. They do so by performing the five daily prayers and fasting throughout the month of Ramadan, which is seen by many as impractical for those still working.²⁸⁸

Naming Conventions

Kazakhs believe that a name should confer good things on a child. For example, to promote longevity, Kazakhs may name their children Mynzhasar (1,000 years) or Zhuzhai (100 years). One visitor encountered a Kazakh whose brothers' names translated to "they will be happy, healthy and sound."²⁸⁹

Exchange 83: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	manalar sizding balalaryngiz ba?
Local:	Yes.	iyaa

²⁸⁶ *Kazakhstan: Coming of Age*. Fergus, Michael and Janar Jandosova. "Chapter 3: Habitat and Ways of Living: The Family [p. 77]." 2004. London: Stacey International.

²⁸⁷ *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. II: Family, Law, and Politics*. Harris, Colette. "Family Relations: Central Asia [p. 141]." Suad Joseph, Ed. 2005. Leiden: Brill.

²⁸⁸ *International Encyclopedia of Adolescence*. Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "Kazakhstan [p. 554]." 2007. New York: Taylor and Francis Group (Routledge).

²⁸⁹ Kazakhnomad's Blog: A Westerner's View of Kazakhstan, Wordpress. "Kidnapping or Stealing the Bride!!!" 28 August 2009. <http://kazakhnomad.wordpress.com/2007/08/28/kidnapping-or-stealing-the-bride/>



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Girl in traditional dress

In other cases, to protect the child, a funny or unattractive name might be chosen, such as Kushikbai (puppy), Ayubai (bear), Eleusiz (unremarkable), or Elemes (unnoticeable).²⁹⁰ This practice originally developed as a method to trick evil spirits, who were believed to be responsible for any harm that befell children; such names were thought to distract the spirits by either provoking laughter or confusion. Thus, they were often used in families with high child mortality rates. For similar reasons, traditional Kazakh names included Tursyn (“may he live”) or Toktasyn (“may he stay”). A couple who has yet to produce a son might name a daughter Ultuar or Ulbolsyn, both of which mean “may she be followed by a boy.”

Names of ancestors and prominent Kazakhs are also bestowed on newborns.

Traditionally, a mullah, or Muslim leader, speaks the name three times into the child’s ear after he recites verses from the Quran, only afterwards is the newborn placed into a cradle for the first time.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Oriental Express Central Asia. “Kazakh Names.” 2003–2009.

http://www.kazakhstan.orexca.com/kazakh_names.shtml

²⁹¹ Silk Road Painting. “Rasing [sic] Children in Kazakhstan.” 2009.

http://www.kazakhcrafts.com/?id=almaty_kazakhstan_kazakistan&subid=2