



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

Research Report

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One Homeland or Two?: Territorialization of Identity and the Repatriation Decision Among the Mongolian-Kazakh Diaspora

Topic of Research: The relationship between identity and territorial attachment is an understudied component of social, ethnic, and national consciousness. Understanding this relationship is increasingly important in an international system where interstate mobility¹ is leading to heightened conditions of economic, political, and cultural transnationalism and the veracity of any delineation of national loyalties and passions along interstate boundaries is progressively faulty.² My dissertation explores the dynamics of homeland formation and reformation among a multi-generational diaspora within the context of the now decade-old independent state of Kazakhstan and the former Soviet sphere-state of Mongolia. My basic questions are: (1) can people have two homelands and (2) what factors are central to the de- and re-territorialization of identity?

Relevance and Contribution to the Field:

¹ Including voluntary and forced migration, tourism, and seasonal/semi-permanent relocation.

² As noted by Mikesell in 1983, the idea of the nation state, even in Western Europe, is and has always been largely a myth. However, increasing interstate mobility is adding new dimensions to the issues of nation and state building, challenges to civil societies, and questions as to who *belongs* where?

King and Melvin (2000, 109) adroitly note that the collapse of the Soviet state represented a kind of "big Bang" for the study of transtate dimensions of ethnicity.³ From this dramatic quasi de-colonization, new states emerged to face the challenge of incorporating into their burgeoning civil societies and patriotic identities the multi-ethnic diasporas that resulted from internal migration (some voluntary, some forced) within the Soviet political sphere. The processes of nation and state building within this sphere are potentially complicated by the existence of a duality of territorial identity among the multiple generations of ethnic minorities and exclusive territoriality among members of the 'titular nations'.⁴

Over the last decade, Kazakhstan has been trying to reconcile its ethnically specific state name with the demographic parity between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. In essence, the *raison de etre* of Kazakhstan remains in question. Is it a homeland predominately for Kazakhs or a multi-national state where ethnicity conveys no privilege? Such questions have, to this point, been understudied in Mongolia due to Mongol (specifically Khalka) demographic predominance. As noted by Bulag (1998), a state of hybridity currently exists between the various Mongol ethnic communities and patriotic Mongolian national conception. Struggling to find their place in this constructed identity are Kazakhs, which represent nearly six percent (6%) of the population. Due in part to cultural overlaps and nation building facilitated by decades of Soviet-style socialism this process has been peaceful. However, a large-scale migration (60,000 of 150,000) of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan indicates that this identity formation has not been pervasively accepted. By studying the Kazakhs remaining in Mongolia and those that have migrated to Kazakhstan, an ideal case study is provided wherein the migration decisions can be evaluated in direct relation to the strength of identity and the role of place at various scales. It is my hope that by elucidating the dynamics of the process of de-and re-territorialization in a study focusing on the Kazakh diaspora, greater sensitivity may be inspired in Kazakhstan's dealings with its own minority-diaspora communities and Mongolia will be able to better manage the inclusion of its largest minority community.

This research project reveals that members of stranded or beached minorities within the former Soviet sphere are currently struggling to reconcile their senses of territorial attachment within their states of residence (host-states) and their

³ In 1989 more than 73 million people lived outside of the borders of the administrative region defined as the homeland of their respective ethnic groups (King and Melvin 2000, 117).

⁴ 'Titular' refers to the ethnic group comprising the demographically dominant population of a given territorial unit during the demarcation of Soviet republics in the 1920s. These republics were given the names of these groups (i.e. titular nations), hence the Kazak SSR, the Kyrgyz SSR etc.

ethno-national identities compelling migration to a 'kin-state'.⁵ Indeed, expanding scholarly understanding of the capacity for people to live and feel a sense of belonging in one territory while retaining loyalties and strong ties to another is essential for all regions of the world. Fundamentally, the assertion of a dual homeland conception is an anathema to the nation-state system; however, with increased mobility and readily available flows of information and capital, such assertions may constitute a new reality to which all governments, especially those of the now decade-old independent states of the former Soviet Union, will need to adjust.

Summary of Approach and Research Methodology:

After extensive exploratory research,⁶ I concluded that while the subjective natures of homeland psychology, territorial attachment, and place-satisfaction, necessitate a primary reliance on in-depth interviews, quantitative analysis derived from surveys would be greatly beneficial in establishing preliminary conclusions. Therefore, I have endeavored to incorporate a variety of methods into this research project in an effort to provide the clearest and most textured explanation possible.

During the first five-months of fieldwork,⁷ over fifty semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing respondents to freely associate ideas and feelings. Through this method, deeply held beliefs were articulated, thereby enabling the researcher to access core values often-masked in surveys and focus groups. Focus groups, in contrast, presented an opportunity to examine collective opinions or those regarded as acceptably expressible by or in front of a peer group. Contrasting the two effectively revealed differences between personal beliefs and collective ideals. Respondents for interviews and focus groups were selected via the "Snowball" sampling technique, where cultural centers and prior contacts facilitate additional contacts.⁸

Non-participant observation proved essential to the exploration of the life-world. Iconography in dwellings and in public spaces provided clues to individual or community consciousness of ethno-national identity and its orientation toward or away from the national homeland. Interviews within the informants' residences and community centers provided an opportunity to question the meanings

⁵ A forthcoming book chapter contrasting the Korean and German minority communities of Kazakhstan suggests a dramatic difference between the levels of territorialization among these groups (Diener forthcoming).

⁶ Exploratory work included a six-month research project (SSRC IPFP) from which two articles are forthcoming.

⁷ This refers to the dissertation fieldwork undertaken from July 2001 - to the present, not the SSRC-IPFP fieldwork.

⁸ While other methods of selecting informant populations may be more secure against bias, the research environments of Mongolia and Kazakhstan require a measure of trust available only through informal social networks. Randomness will be cultivated in the distribution of demographic factors such as age, gender, occupation, class, and sub-identities (horde-tribe, horde, social, and territorial)

associated with iconography and the timing of its incorporation into the visual landscape.⁹ Determining the timing (pre-independence, early independence, or late independence period) of the distribution of paraphernalia relating to particular places and scales of place contributed to an understanding of the construction of identity. Ethnographic observation of elements of verbal art (for example ballads, folklore, and poetry) provided similar evidence of localization or nationalization. Furthermore, witnessing interactions of both community leaders and non-elites confirmed or at least provided greater depth of understanding of the trends brought to light by other methods.

In an effort to triangulate the qualitative data derived from the aforementioned methods, I distributed surveys among both repatriated Mongolian-Kazakhs in Kazakhstan and those remaining or having returned to Mongolia (S=1000+). Statistical analysis of the databases resulting from these surveys was utilized to generate conclusions that have been checked by follow-up interviews.

Analysis of primary and secondary source material such as official documents, census data, speeches, books, textbooks, newspaper and journal articles contributed and continues to contribute to the researcher's understanding of the manner in which the repatriates have been portrayed in the media and protected/advantaged or discriminated against in the law. Further analysis of these sources will reveal the kinds of materials that have been produced to facilitate re-territorialization among the diaspora communities within Kazakhstan and facilitate or impede return migration among Kazakhs abroad.

The experimental method of sketch mapping homeland conceptions in combination with semi-structured interviews, wherein qualitative data was derived pertaining to 'satisfaction with place', 'desire to migrate', and 'attachment to homeland' proved difficult at first but as the method was perfected it became increasingly rewarding (a methodological article is planned on this particular topic).

As demonstrated by the array of methods involved, this study endeavored to couple a rigorous social science approach with a phenomenological approach in an effort to lay bare the political, economic, cultural, and psychological factors playing into the questions of territorial attachment and its effect on personal and community self-conception. With the fieldwork complete and the initial phases of analysis underway, I can state with great satisfaction that the project was a success and should facilitate a textured and well-rounded discussion of the core questions.

Progress in Data Collection and Future Plans

⁹ Through this process, I hope to gain insight into the causal relationship - 'did iconography cultivate attachment to the traditional homeland or did attachment to the traditional homeland inspire the use of Kazakhstani iconography?'

The research for my dissertation began under the auspices of the SSRC-IPFP (1999-2000). Extensive library research was conducted during the first six months of my fellowship period resulting in an article currently under review with the journal *Eurasian Geography and Economics* and the theoretical section of a second article currently in preparation for an area studies journal. In addition, course work at the University of Wisconsin facilitated the formation of my theoretical framework for territorialization, the core of which is found in an article under revision for resubmission.

My IREX sponsored research trip began in Mongolia in July of 2001 under the auspices of an IREX-Mongolia field-research grant. I spent several weeks in Ulan Baatar interviewing elites and refining my survey and interview questions. For the next month, I traveled throughout the western-most aimag (province) of Mongolian (Bayan Olgi) distributing and collecting surveys and conducting interviews and focus groups among various segments of the Kazakh community. In addition to these interviews, I engaged in discussions with local elites and non-Kazakh occupants of the aimag in order to gain an understanding of the migration's impact on the relationships between Kazakhs and their Mongolian neighbors.

Following my return to Ulan Baatar, I made several research trips to the predominantly Kazakh mining town of Nalaikh, where I also conducted interviews and focus groups while distributing and collecting surveys. Additional interviews and surveys were conducted in Ulan Baatar itself, as was a considerable amount of library research. Mongolian newspapers were reviewed for discussion of issues relating to the Kazakhs and Mongolian academic materials (articles, books, dissertations and theses) were copied for future analysis. All in all, over six hundred (600) surveys were conducted among Kazakhs in Mongolia and thirty-plus (30+) interviews and focus groups were undertaken.

At the end of August my IREX-IARO grant period began. I flew to Kazakhstan and began the second phase of the research project. Again, I began by interviewing elites and refining interview and survey questions. A similar but not identical survey to the one used in Mongolia was conducted among some six hundred-plus (600+) Kazakhs from Mongolia in various urban and rural settings throughout Kazakhstan (including Astana, Karaganda, Temirtau, Aktau, Almaty, Pavladar, and Shimkent). Interviews and focus groups were also conducted, totaling nearly fifty (50) by early November. Library research was an essential segment of this portion of the project, as I endeavored to understand how the migration of the early 1990s was instigated, managed, and eventually discouraged. In addition, I sought to gather materials explaining how the returnees or *Oralmandar*, as they are referred to in Kazakhstan, have been and are currently integrated into Kazakhstani society. The fulfillment of 'return myths' and the reconstruction of homeland conceptions within the reality of a multi-national Kazakhstani society was the central focus of my work throughout

November and December. This involved some work with non-Kazakh minorities and their impressions of the development of an inclusive Kazakhstani identity.

By late December, I was able to turn my attention to analysis of the survey and initial interview data. Processing of both the Kazakhstani and Mongolian surveys into digital form was carried out with the assistance of KISEF (the Kazakhstan Institute for Sociological and Economic Forecasting). New questions arose from the analysis of the databases and for the remainder of my time in Kazakhstan, I engaged in follow-up interviews and focus groups attempting to verify and clarify conclusions.

At the end of April, I returned to Mongolia and engaged in follow-up interviews and focus groups, while continuing with the library research started the previous summer. A trip to Bayan Olgi was very productive, in that I was able to have access to more people due to the season (summer is the 'country-side' season, when a majority of Mongolian citizens take to their *gers* and *yurts* in the vast expanse of rural Mongolia). Following the completion of my work in the west, I opted to forego the flight back to Ulan Bataar in favor of a cross-country journey via an UAZ (the Soviet military Jeep). The adventure was harrowing and informative, providing me an opportunity to see Kazakhs in Khovd aimag, a number of well-preserved Turkic graves sites, and to view first-hand the progress made on the 'Millennium Highway.'

This latter issue is important because the "Millennium Highway" will be the first permanent transportation linkage between eastern, central, and western Mongolia (no Railroad exists in Mongolia other than an north South link between China and the Soviet Union and currently only dirt roads span the length of the country). I hypothesize that this transportation artery will have a significant impact on the Kazakhs in the future and, as such, I have begun a monitoring project that I plan to continue throughout the next ten years. Returning to Ulan Baatar, I completed my library research and follow-up interviews.

In relation to the original research plan, I was able to complete all the work I had intended. The biggest deviation from my research plan was my choice not to secure the assistance of a sociological research institute to assist in the distribution and collection of the surveys. In Mongolia, such a research infrastructure is just becoming available and remains subject to traditional seasonal unavailability. By arriving in the summer, I was unable to utilize such an institute. As it turned out, this was an advantage, in that as a small minority community the Kazakhs of Mongolia are more readily and comfortably accessed through their rather tight and intimate social networks.

Having conducted the surveys successfully in Mongolia with the help of members of the informal social networks (trained in the appropriate methods), I realized the advantages of carrying out this particular project without the assistance of an

institute. In the case of the *Oralmandar* or Mongolian-Kazakhs that have returned to Kazakhstan, approaching them through the group's social network was even more important. The precarious position of the *Oralmandar*, as neither citizens of Mongolia or Kazakhstan makes them uneasy around official or quasi-official institutions. By engaging members of the local social networks of the community in the distribution and collection of surveys, I believe I was able to acquire a far more honest and willing expression of feeling and opinion than I would have through representatives of a research institute. The subsequent discovery of tension between Kazakhstani-Kazakhs and the diasporic returnees further emphasizes this point.

With the help of the *Oralman*-elite, the distribution and collection of the surveys was both accurate and efficient. Having painstakingly instructed the elites as to how the surveys should be conducted, I had very few complaints as to the methods used and feel confident in the results obtained. Furthermore, these research assistants served as an ideal entry point into the Mongolian-Kazakh community. In both Mongolia and Kazakhstan a cross-section of the community was readily available to me for interviews and focus groups. To a far greater extent than I expected, I was able to achieve the research goals set out in my proposal.

My future plans pertaining to this project are multi-fold. First, I intend to complete and submit articles started in the field (see section 4 of the IREX Field Report). Second, I will continue with the analysis of the data collected and begin writing draft chapters of my dissertation. Third, I plan to present sections of the data analysis at conferences throughout the next academic year. Fourth, I intend to apply for faculty positions throughout the autumn and spring semesters and interview for jobs as opportunities present themselves. Fifth, I will defend my dissertation in May of 2003. The final aspect of my current research project is the prospective submission of the dissertation to an academic publisher in book-manuscript form. This will be facilitated by future work either as a faculty member (assistant professor) or in a post-doctoral fellowship position

Summary of Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions:

Based on initial analysis of data collected during eleven (11) months of research among the Mongolian-Kazakhs in Mongolia and Kazakhstan, it appears that a clear divergence in individual and community identity has developed within the two geographic camps. Those remaining in Mongolia express high levels of territorialization to both Mongolia as a whole and to smaller scales of place within Mongolia (i.e. the Kazakh *aimag* of Bayan Olgi, specific *sumons*/counties or towns and cities), while those that have migrated to Kazakhstan express a commitment to remain in Kazakhstan but retain strong attachments to smaller scales of place in Mongolia. Such preliminary results are not unexpected and compel a more in-depth examination of the demographic structure of these results and the degree to which the communities' reactions support or repudiate the theoretical frameworks employed in this study.

Initial analysis using 'desire to migrate,' 'satisfaction with place,' and 'conception of homeland' as separate but mutually influential dependent variables suggests patterns relating to a series of independent variables such as 'stage of life,' 'level of education,' 'occupation,' 'gender,' and 'age of children'. Additional analysis is currently being carried out using phenomenological variables such as:

(1) belief that social relations are primary in homeland construction; (2) belief that burial of ancestors in place is central to homeland construction; (3) belief that ethno-national identity is primordially tied to a specific territory – Kazakhstan's independence requires the in-gathering of the diaspora; (4) raised to return – propagation of return myth, (4) experience of residence in alternative countries; (5) effect of satisfaction with current location in Mongolia/Kazakhstan; (6) sense of *Shinjiang* as potential homeland (Most Mongolian Kazakhs came to Mongolia via Western China); (7) valence of the flows of information/capital; (8) pride in cultural retention resulting from diasporic existence; (9) degree of assimilation to Mongolian culture – language, etc.; (10) belief that ethnicity affects access to education and jobs in both Kazakhstan and Mongolia; (11) change in ethnic consciousness since independence; (12) benefits for returning Kazakhs; (13) *born-in* as primary component of homeland construction.

Analysis of the relationships between these variables will help determine if territorialization is most readily understood as an instrumentalist, primordialist, or constructivist process.

My preliminary conclusions point to the prominence of the constructivist approach, wherein both instrumentalist and primordialist issues are present but remain subjected to manipulation by elites and contingent upon historical, economic, cultural, and political circumstances. I will, therefore, endeavor to test my own theoretical framework for territorialization, which posits that a combination of familiarity (experience in place), partiality (membership in social networks), and myth and meaning (psychological bonds relating to notions of belonging) is a superior mode of conceptualizing territorialization, as compared to the reductionist frameworks that focus on only one of these factors.

Using both the quantitative data derived from the survey analysis and the qualitative data derived from both the interviews and literature reviews, the structure of my framework appears sound. As with many theoretical frameworks, its value is in expanding scholarly understanding of the phenomenon. If initial results continue along their current trajectory, this mode of thinking about territorialization of identity will constitute a serious contribution to understanding the relationship between identity and territory.

Suggestions for Future Research Agendas:

An additional result of this research is a clearer understanding of the duality of diasporic territorial identity. Indeed, I will argue that diasporic identity may operate at two or more distinct scales of place, the most prominent of which

include an ethno-national identity territorialized to a 'national' homeland (kin-state) and a local social identity territorialized within the spatial and social networks of current places of residence (sub-host state). From the voluminous literature pertaining to the Russian diaspora,¹⁰ it is clear that both host-states and kin-states can profoundly affect the security, stability, and degree to which non-titular ethno-national populations foresee a future for themselves and their children in their current places of residence. The territorial articulations of ethnic identity, commonly seen in the Soviet territorial administrative structure of ethnic raions (currently known as "areas of concentrated or compact settlement") and autonomous oblasts, have laid the groundwork for divergent futures for the region's ethnic minorities.

One possibility is that existence within 'ethnic-places' will cultivate hyphenated ethno-national identities by promoting satisfaction with current residences and confidence in a multi-cultural future. A second possibility is the production of geographies of resistance from the structure of limited ethnic autonomy. The now decade-old country of Kazakhstan and the post-socialist but moderately nationalizing country of Mongolia provide ideal cases in point. Herein this dissertation will explore the degree to which territorial articulation of ethnicity within a state's administrative structure contributes to the re-territorialization of minority identity. Factors such as contiguity to the 'kin-state', economic conditions, historical claims to current territories of residence, and cultural compatibility with the host community will be considered as potentially impacting independent variables. These questions are important not simply as they relate to the Mongolian-Kazakhs and the ethnic-*aimag* of Bayan Olgi but to the more than one-hundred different ethnic minorities currently living in Kazakhstan.

Recommendations for the US Policy Community:

It is eminently clear that monitoring the social, political, economic, and cultural climate of Central Asia is imperative. Following the events of September 11 it has become obvious that there is a dearth of expertise relating to the 'stans' within the United States. As over a decade has past since the emergence of these countries as independent states, the decreasing relevance of 'Former Soviet Experts' in analyzing this region becomes more apparent. Without a doubt, the Soviet legacy will remain important in the 'stans' but as these states develop their own social, political, cultural and economic policies a greater need for experts trained specifically in this region will emerge. Indeed, it is obvious that we are looking at a new world region - in many ways like the heavily studied developing regions of South-West Asia, like Sub-Saharan Africa, like Latin America, and South-East Asia - requiring area studies centers in different universities. It should also be noted that conferences and a U.S. based journal dedicated to the study of this region should be launched in an effort to bring the different disciplinary perspectives together.

¹⁰ See Chinn and Kaiser 1996, Laitin 1998, Sapozhnikov 1999, Abdilgapiiev 1995.

Not to sound alarmist but even a tertiary examination of the population pyramids of the now decade-old independent countries of former Soviet Central Asia reveals exorbitantly large youth cohorts. Given the disillusionment stemming from the loss of socialistic stability, upon which many were raised to depend, and the continuing economic and ecological problems plaguing the region, it is not unreasonable to see this region as potential breeding ground for fanaticism and anti-Americanism.

It is of course premature to speculate on such problems and indeed my experience in the region does not indicate that such a turn is on the immediate horizon, but the United States must be aware of the possibility and endeavor to formulate policy that will deal with the region responsibly. As noted above monitoring is the first stage. A second stage would involve increased funding to research and aid projects in the region wherein a more benevolent face is put on the 'capitalist west'. A third stage would involve increased pressure to democratize and institute market reforms.

Good progress is being made on a number of these fronts by USAID, Soros, SSRC, Fulbright, and IREX but the attention paid to the region in academia and the domestic institutions from which future leaders and innovators emerge remains insufficient. The notion of 'selective engagement' is rightfully applied to Central Asia, in that all of the problems cannot be solved from the outside nor should they be, however, it is imperative that the United States be well informed as to the situation in the region so that responsible selections can be made for our foreign policy engagement.

I believe this region is at a turning point in history. It could go in any number of directions - from abject poverty, to devolution into internal conflict, to mobilization around anti-western/ American ideas, or it could be steered toward embracing enlightenment principles of individualism, free markets and democracy. In the late 1800s, Sir Halfred Mackinder deemed this region the heartland of the world island and considered it essential to peace and security of the west. With the discovery of oil in the Caspian region and the evidence of a global reach of international terrorism from a neighboring state (Afghanistan), the reality of Central Asia's emergence as a new and important world region should not be overlooked.
