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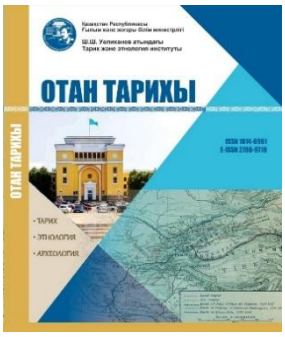

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ADAPTATION CHALLENGES OF ETHNIC REPATRIATES IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN: A HISTORICAL-CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This article examines the processes of ethnic repatriation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan through the lens of historical that continue to influence contemporary society. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, tens of thousands of ethnic Kazakhs returned from China, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Iran, and other countries. Their arrival became not only a demographic phenomenon but also an important socio-cultural event contributing to the revitalization of national identity and the reassessment of collective historical memory. *Purpose and objectives.* The main aim of the study is to analyze the adaptation of ethnic repatriates in the context of long-term historical developments and institutional transformations inherited from the imperial, Soviet, and early post-Soviet periods. The research identifies key factors influencing adaptation and examines how these factors affect the integration of ethnic Kazakhs into modern Kazakhstani society. *Materials and methods.* This study employs a combination of comparative historical analysis, sociocultural interpretation, and a historical-analytical approach, allowing for a thorough examination of the continuity between past administrative and social structures and contemporary adaptation processes. General scientific methods of analysis and synthesis are applied to provide a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the topic. The research is grounded in a critical evaluation of historical determinants that influence current adaptation mechanisms. *Results.* The findings show that repatriation is a multidimensional process shaped by historical memory, institutional arrangements, and social perceptions. Administrative practices, demographic patterns, and community attitudes, formed over decades of Soviet and post-Soviet development, continue to influence integration. Linguistic and cultural differences may reproduce internal distinctions within the Kazakh ethnic community, complicating social cohesion. *Conclusion.* The study concludes that the adaptation of repatriates should be understood as an effort to navigate historically rooted

social and cultural boundaries. Recognizing these factors provides a deeper understanding of contemporary integration processes in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: repatriation, ethnic Kazakhs, adaptation, historical factors, identity, integration.
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ПОСТКЕҢЕСТІК ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ЭТНИКАЛЫҚ РЕПАТРИАНТТАРДЫҢ БЕЙІМДЕЛУ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ: ТАРИХИ-КОНТЕКСТУАЛДЫҚ ТАЛДАУ

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Аңдатпа. *Кіріспе.* Бұл мақалада посткеңестік Қазақстандағы этникалық репатриация процестері қазіргі қоғамға әсер етуін жалғастырып келе жатқан тарихи факторлар тұрғысынан қарастырылады. Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан кейін Қытай, Өзбекстан, Моңғолия, Иран және басқа да елдерден ондаған мың этникалық қазақтар тарихи отанына оралды. Олардың келуі демографиялық құбылыс қана емес, ұлттық бірегейлікті жаңғыртуға және тарихи жадты қайта пайымдауға ықпал еткен маңызды әлеуметтік-мәдени оқиға болды. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – этникалық репатрианттардың бейімделу процесін империялық, кеңестік және посткеңестік кезеңдерден мұраға қалған ұзақ мерзімді тарихи оқиғалар мен институционалдық өзгерістер контекстінде талдау. Мақала бейімделуге әсер ететін негізгі факторларды анықтайды және олардың этникалық қазақтардың қазіргі қазақстандық қоғамға интеграциялану үрдісіндегі рөлін зерттейді. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Бұл зерттеу салыстырмалы тарихи талдаудың, әлеуметтік-мәдени түсіндірудің және тарихи-аналитикалық тәсілдің үйлесімін қолданады, бұл өткен әкімшілік және әлеуметтік құрылымдар мен қазіргі заманғы бейімделу процестері арасындағы сабақтастықты мұқият зерттеуге мүмкіндік береді. Тақырыпты жүйелі және жан-жақты түсіну үшін талдау мен синтездің жалпы ғылыми әдістері қолданылады. Зерттеу қазіргі бейімделу механизмдерін анықтайтын тарихи дәлелдемелерді сыни бағалауға негізделген. *Нәтижелер.* Зерттеу нәтижелері репатриацияның тарихи жады, институционалдық жағдайлар және қоғамдық көзқарастармен айқындалатын көпқырлы үдеріс екенін көрсетеді. Кеңестік және посткеңестік кезеңдерде қалыптасқан әкімшілік практика, демографиялық ерекшеліктер және жергілікті қауымдастықтардың ұстанымдары бейімделу үдерісіне әлі де ықпал етеді. Тілдік және мәдени айырмашылықтар кейде қазақ этносы ішіндегі ішкі жіктерді қайта жаңғыртады, ал бұл әлеуметтік үйлесімділікті қиындатады. *Қорытынды.* Зерттеу репатрианттардың бейімделуін жай ғана әлеуметтік интеграция емес, тарихи қалыптасқан әрі әлеуметтік және мәдени шекараларды еңсеру үдерісі ретінде қарастыру қажеттігін көрсетеді. Осы факторларды түсіну қазіргі Қазақстандағы интеграция үдерістерін тереңірек ұғынуға мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: репатриация, этникалық қазақтар, бейімделу, тарихи факторлар, бірегейлік, интеграция.
Алғыс: бұл мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитетінің қаржылай қолдауымен, ЖТН AP26197965 «Посткеңестік Қазақстандағы этникалық репатрианттардың күнделікті өмірі: бейімделу стратегиялары мен интеграциялық тәжірибелері (Жетісу облысының мысалында) жоба аясында дайындалды
Дәйексөз үшін: Байғабатова Н.К., Абдрахим М.Е. Посткеңестік Қазақстандағы этникалық репатрианттардың бейімделу мәселелері: тарихи-контекстуалдық талдау // Отан тарихы. 2025. Т. 28. № 4. 1050–1062-бб. [ағылшын тілінде]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2025_28_4_1050-1062

ПРОБЛЕМЫ АДАПТАЦИИ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ РЕПАТРИАНТОВ В ПОСТСОВЕТСКОМ КАЗАХСТАНЕ: ИСТОРИКО-КОНТЕКСТУАЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Данная статья рассматривает процессы этнической репатриации в постсоветском Казахстане через призму исторических факторов, продолжающих влиять на современное общество. После распада Советского Союза десятки тысяч этнических казахов вернулись на историческую родину из Китая, Узбекистана, Монголии, Ирана и других стран. Их возвращение стало не только демографическим явлением, но и важным социокультурным событием, способствовавшим возрождению национальной идентичности и переосмыслению коллективной исторической памяти. *Цель и задачи.* Основная цель исследования – проанализировать адаптацию этнических репатриантов в контексте длительных исторических процессов и институциональных трансформаций, унаследованных от имперского, советского и раннего постсоветского периодов. В рамках исследования определяются ключевые факторы, влияющие на адаптацию, а также рассматривается их влияние на процессы интеграции этнических казахов в современное казахстанское общество. *Материалы и методы.* В данном исследовании используется сочетание сравнительно-исторического анализа, социокультурной интерпретации и историко-аналитического подхода, что позволяет глубоко изучить преемственность между прошлыми административными и социальными структурами и современными процессами адаптации. Для обеспечения системного и всестороннего понимания темы применяются общенаучные методы анализа и синтеза. Исследование основано на критической оценке исторических факторов, определяющих современные механизмы адаптации. *Результаты.* Проведенный анализ показывает, что репатриация представляет собой многомерный процесс, формируемый исторической памятью, институциональными условиями и социальными представлениями. Административные практики, демографические особенности и общественные установки, сформировавшиеся в советский и постсоветский периоды, продолжают влиять на интеграцию. Языковые и культурные различия нередко воспроизводят внутренние различия внутри казахского этноса, осложняя социальную консолидацию. *Заключение.* В исследовании показано, что адаптацию репатриантов следует рассматривать не только как процесс интеграции, но и как преодоление исторически сложившихся социальных и культурных границ.

Осмысление этих факторов позволяет глубже понять современные процессы интеграции в Казахстане.
Ключевые слова: репатриация, этнические казахи, адаптация, исторические факторы, идентичность, интеграция.
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Introduction. In the period following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Kazakhstan began to receive significant numbers of ethnic repatriates, primarily ethnic Kazakhs returning from abroad, where they had lived for several generations. These repatriates constitute an important component of the state's national policy, aimed at restoring ethnocultural cohesion and achieving demographic balance. However, their adaptation within the socio-cultural and economic spheres has encountered considerable challenges that go beyond material conditions, encompassing issues of social integration, cultural adjustment, and questions of ethnic identity and a sense of belonging [Werner et al., 2015].

The relevance of this study is determined by several factors. First of all, Kazakhstan's state policy continues to promote repatriation as a mechanism for strengthening national identity and preserving cultural heritage. Secondly, despite the availability of governmental support, a significant number of repatriates face difficulties in the process of social adaptation, which manifest in cultural and linguistic barriers as well as in socio-psychological challenges [Sultanmuratov, 2017]. Thirdly, a systematic understanding of the historical and social factors that hinder successful integration is a necessary prerequisite for developing effective state support measures and for shaping an inclusive society.

A comprehensive understanding of the contemporary challenges of repatriate adaptation requires taking into account the historical and cultural context shaped by the legacy of the imperial and Soviet periods in Kazakhstan. For several centuries, the territory of Kazakhstan experienced administrative, social, and cultural transformations that influenced traditional practices, social hierarchies, and patterns of interethnic interaction. These historical processes continue to affect present-day ethnic relations, language policies, and social expectations, directly influencing the processes of adaptation for repatriates.

The contemporary barriers faced by repatriates can be traced to these historical and social transformations. Linguistic difficulties, cultural differences, and social marginalization are linked to the legacies of past political and social structures, which shaped specific patterns of interaction and perceptions of ethnic belonging [Kurganskaya et al., 2024: 68-69]. These factors may generate internal identity conflicts and intensify the challenges of the adaptation process, requiring attention from both scholars and policymakers.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical and social factors influencing the adaptation of ethnic repatriates in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. The study seeks to identify the key barriers and mechanisms that hinder successful integration, as well as to examine possible ways of overcoming them. In this way, the research aims to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of ethnic identity, social adaptation, and cultural adjustment within the contemporary context of Kazakhstan through the studying historical past.

Methodology. The methodology of this article is grounded in a historical-analytical approach, which makes it possible to examine the adaptation of ethnic repatriates through the lens of historical and social factors that have shaped contemporary Kazakhstan. The study employs insights from social and historical theory to reveal the interconnections between past developments and present-day integration processes. A historical-comparative analysis is applied to juxtapose various factors influencing adaptation. This approach allows for the generalization of accumulated experience and highlights the systemic nature of the challenges faced by repatriates.

In addition, the sequence of historical and social factors influencing the adaptation of repatriates in contemporary Kazakhstani society is arranged from the most fundamental to the derivative, reflecting the logic of their historical interconnections. The analysis begins with the basic conditions of adaptation, including language and social norms, followed by structural and institutional elements related to

demography, education, and bureaucracy. The sequence concludes with cultural consequences and the resulting internal divisions within the ethnos, which represent the cumulative effect of all preceding factors.

Moreover, the article employs a historical-narrative and systems approach, as well as the principle of historicism, which makes it possible to examine the problem of repatriate adaptation in contemporary Kazakhstani society in its development and in connection with other socio-political and economic processes that have unfolded in the country during the years of independence. Furthermore, general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis were applied, ensuring the comprehensive character of the study.

It is important to note that this article focuses on exploring the historical roots of the issue, drawing solely on historical evidence. The study is introductory in nature and represents the theoretical-historical stage of a larger project on the adaptation of ethnic repatriates. This work does not use materials of observations, surveys, or other methods of collecting contemporary data, as its main aim is to examine historical factors and trace the causal connections that have influenced current adaptation processes. This approach lays a strong historical foundation for further research and offers a deeper understanding of the dynamics of repatriates' integration into contemporary society.

Discussion. The issue of repatriation and integration of ethnic Kazakhs who returned to their historical homeland after the collapse of the USSR occupies a prominent place in contemporary scholarship in Kazakhstan and abroad. The historiography of this subject is characterized by its multidimensionality, encompassing sociological, cultural, political and legal approaches.

Early studies (2000s – early 2010s) were mainly focused on the general characteristics of the repatriation process. Thus, in the works of S. Orazalyuly [Orazalyuly, 2010], B. Kalshabayeva and her colleagues [Kalshabayeva, Seisenbayeva, 2013], [Kalshabayeva, Yegizbayeva, 2025], as well as Kalysh and Kassymova [Kalysh, Kassymova, 2013]; [Kalysh, Kassymova, 2014], the socio-cultural challenges faced by repatriates, as well as the first practices of state policy in this field, were examined in detail. These studies laid the foundation for the conceptualization of the notion of "repatriate" and the problematics of adaptation.

Sociological and cultural studies of the 2010s–2020s [Bokayev et al., 2012; Dossanova et al., 2021] focused on issues of language identity, ethnocultural adaptation, as well as the everyday practices of interaction between repatriates and the local population. Particular attention was paid to the role of language as a key factor of integration [Bokayev et al., 2012], as well as to the transnational ties and family strategies maintained by repatriates from China and Mongolia [Zharkynbekova et al., 2024].

Legal and institutional aspects were further developed in the works of Zhampeissov [Zhampeissov, 2013], Zhailybayev and co-authors [Zhailybayev et al., 2020], and Baimoldina [Baimoldina, 2013]. These studies examine the legal mechanisms regulating repatriation and integration, as well as the socio-legal engagement of young repatriates. They also highlight the tension between the formal regulatory framework and the actual practices of adaptation.

The economic dimension of the topic is addressed in the works of Mussina and co-authors [Mussina et al., 2022] and Zhapakov et al. [Zhapakov et al., 2020], which focus on employment, the impact on internal migration, and the economic marginality of repatriates. Such studies demonstrate that social integration is directly linked to economic opportunities and regional disparities.

Regional studies [Zhanbossinova, Karibayev, 2019]; [Musina et al., 2024]; [Atantayeva et al., 2015]; [Karibayev, 2021] highlight the specific features of adaptation practices in the eastern and western regions of Kazakhstan. These works show that the perception of repatriates varies across regions and is shaped by both demographic factors and socio-cultural conditions.

In recent years, historiography has shifted its focus from general issues to more specialized topics such as the role of repatriate organizations in integration [Kaiser, Beimenbetov, 2020], questions of terminology [Sharimova, 2024], transnational practices [Zharkynbekova et al., 2024], and the ethnopsychological aspects of adaptation [Baimoldina, 2013]. This trend reflects the gradual professionalization of research in this field and its increasingly interdisciplinary character.

It is not difficult to observe that the existing studies on Kazakh repatriation generally address the problem of adaptation from various perspectives such as sociological, cultural, economic and legal aspects. However, none of these works approach it through the lens of the colonial past, limiting themselves to descriptions of current difficulties and historical consequences without conceptualizing them in postcolonial terms. Even when authors mention the effects of imperial or Soviet policies, such as borders, demographics, or language, they tend to present them as mere "historical background" rather than as a conceptual framework for analysis.

Foreign research on Kazakh repatriation and the situation of the Oralmans covers a wide range of issues from challenges of adaptation and sociocultural identity to transnational practices and state migration policies. The works of A. Diener [Diener, 2005]; [Diener, 2009], H. Barcus [Barcus, 2010]; [Barcus, 2015] and C. Werner [Werner et al., 2017] examine everyday strategies, language policy, and the migration trajectories of Kazakhs from Mongolia and China, paying attention both to transnational connections and to the internal barriers encountered within Kazakhstan. Another line of research focuses on the institutional and political frameworks of repatriation [Skrentny, 2007]; [Oka, 2013], as well as on ethnic and language policies in the post-Soviet period [Dave, 2007]; [Laruelle, Peyrouse, 2007]. Overall, foreign historiography views repatriation as part of broader processes of nationalization, migration and transnationalism.

While foreign scholars seldom refer directly to the notion of a "colonial past", its influence is evident in many of their works. Bhavna Dave [Dave, 2007], for instance, argues that the privileged position of the Russian language and the social hierarchy built around it are clear continuations of imperial and Soviet legacies. Peter Sinnott [Sinnott, 2003] examines demographic transformations in Kazakhstan and traces them back to resettlement campaigns carried out during the Soviet period, a process that can be seen as a continuation of demographic engineering practices.

More specifically, Alexander Diener points out that Kazakhs in Mongolia and China were divided by borders established first by the Russian Empire and later by the Soviet Union, which predetermined their cultural distance from the "metropole". In his work "One Homeland or Two? The Nationalization and Transnationalization of Mongolia's Kazakhs", Alexander Diener argues that the state borders established in the XX century fragmented what had once been a unified ethnic community, turning it into a "transnational people" [Diener, 2009: 7-9] and thereby complicating the process of return to Kazakhstan [Diener, 2009: 155-158]. Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse examine cross-border minorities, noting that their intermediary role between China and Central Asia emerged as a result of imperial and Soviet territorial divisions. Although the authors do not explicitly employ postcolonial terminology, their work clearly demonstrates that the contemporary challenges of repatriate adaptation are deeply rooted in the historical experience of colonial governance, border policies, and demographic practices [Laruelle, Peyrouse, 2007: 56–58].

Both Kazakhstani and international studies address, directly or indirectly, certain manifestations of the colonial and Soviet legacy, whether demographic engineering, language policy, or cross-border processes. Yet, for the most part, these aspects are treated merely as isolated elements of the historical background, without offering a comprehensive analysis of repatriation from a postcolonial perspective. It is precisely this gap that creates an opportunity for further research aimed at interpreting the adaptation processes of repatriates through the prism of the historical past and its long-term consequences.

Results. It is clear that the adaptation of repatriates in post-Soviet Kazakhstan is closely linked to the country's historical development and long-term social transformations. Many of the difficulties experienced by ethnic Kazakhs returning from neighboring or distant countries have roots in earlier political, linguistic, and administrative processes that shaped social structures throughout the twentieth century. During these periods, specific cultural and institutional patterns emerged that continue to influence contemporary Kazakhstani society.

To understand these processes, it is important to identify several key historical factors. Among them are: the linguistic environment formed over many decades; social hierarchy and patterns of economic inequality; demographic shifts that changed the ethnic composition of various regions; the bureaucratic system inherited from previous administrative models; evolving perceptions of cultural identity; and internal differences within the wider Kazakh ethnic community. Each of these factors will be examined in detail, from their historical formation to their present manifestations in Kazakhstan.

One of the most significant factors affecting the adaptation of repatriates today is the persistence of language barriers and the existing "hierarchy of languages". In this context, language operates not only as a means of daily communication but also as a key resource for access to education, employment, and social mobility [Bourdieu, 1986: 241–258]. The long-term promotion of the Russian language, first under the administrative policies of the Russian Empire [Sadvokassova, 2008] and later throughout the Soviet period [Zhumanova, 2016], led to its dominant position in public, educational, and professional spheres, creating a structural advantage for those proficient in it.

From the perspective of social theory, language represents a field of power relations in which the "dominant" language shapes communication norms and contributes to the formation of social hierarchies [Spivak, 1988: 271–313; Said, 1993: 290–292]. A similar situation in Kazakhstan today reflects what Homi

K. Bhabha describes as the “ambivalence of discourse” [Bhabha, 1994: 85–92]: while fluency in Russian provides individuals with broader opportunities for social advancement, it simultaneously produces feelings of cultural distance or marginalization among those who lack this linguistic capital.

One of the key historical factors influencing the adaptation of ethnic repatriates in Kazakhstan is the legacy of linguistic and socio-cultural developments formed over the twentieth century. Repatriates arriving from countries where Kazakh or other non-Russian languages are predominantly used often face notable professional and cultural limitations due to insufficient knowledge of Russian [Tazhibayeva, Zharkynbekova, 2023]. Those returning from Mongolia, China, Iran, and Turkey encounter particularly significant difficulties, as their limited Russian-language skills restrict access to education, employment, and public services. In comparison, repatriates from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan adapt more easily, since many of them possess basic or intermediate Russian proficiency. This discrepancy reflects differences in historical experiences, including the degree of contact with Russian-speaking environments during the twentieth century.

Scholars point out that language continues to function as an important marker of ethnic belonging and affects individuals’ ability to establish social connections [Smagulova, 2008: 440–475]. Proficiency in widely used languages enables repatriates to integrate more quickly into new professional and social settings, whereas the absence of such skills creates long-term structural limitations. Understanding the role of linguistic barriers highlights the need for targeted support, including language courses, educational initiatives, and professional training adapted to current labor-market requirements.

Another important historical factor is the persistence of socio-economic hierarchies that developed throughout the twentieth century. These hierarchies shaped distinctions between urban and rural populations, as well as between groups with different levels of access to education and administrative resources. Repatriates returning from various regions such as post-Soviet states, China, Iran, Afghanistan, and others, often entered a socio-economic environment in which opportunities were unequally distributed. Kazakhstan inherited a social structure where urban residency, familiarity with industrial labor, and connections to administrative institutions provided significant advantages. By contrast, many repatriates had primarily agricultural experience, limited economic resources, insufficient language skills, and a lack of established networks within state and economic structures, placing them at the margins of the social system [Bokayev, 2011: 106].

A historically shaped peripheral social position reinforced a sense of marginality among many repatriates. Even with state support programs, quotas, and targeted assistance measures, repatriates often faced difficulties in securing prestigious employment, accessing quality education, and achieving upward social mobility. The social structure inherited from the Soviet period, strongly influenced by urban norms and established professional hierarchies, frequently perceived newcomers as “outsiders”, which further complicated their adaptation. At the same time, economic vulnerability encouraged repatriates to form tight-knit communities that preserved elements of traditional culture. While this helped maintain cultural identity, it also slowed their integration into the broader social environment [Khizat, 2015: 61–63].

Thus, the factor of social and economic marginalization manifested itself in a dual way. On the one hand, it hindered the integration of repatriates into the post-Soviet social system, anchoring them on the lower levels of the social hierarchy. On the other hand, it stimulated the development of adaptive strategies, expressed through the creation of informal support networks, the preservation of cultural practices, and gradual inclusion in Kazakhstan’s socio-economic life [Laruelle, 2010; Diener, 2009].

Another significant historical factor shaping repatriate adaptation concerns the long-term demographic processes that unfolded in Kazakhstan throughout the twentieth century. State-led demographic policies were often designed to redistribute the population in accordance with political, economic, or administrative needs. These processes included the mass settlement of Slavic populations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the deportations of various ethnic groups in the 1930s–1940s, and the Virgin Lands campaign, which substantially transformed the demographic landscape of the northern and central regions of the republic [Alekseyenko, Aubakirova, 2017: 129–130].

These historical demographic shifts created a complex ethno-social environment into which repatriates began returning in the 1990s. Differences in regional population density, levels of urbanization, economic development, and patterns of interethnic interaction shaped their adaptation trajectories and produced significant regional variations in integration outcomes.

These historical processes created structural conditions that contributed to the marginalization of both local Kazakhs and repatriates returning to Kazakhstan in the 1990s. Repatriates entered a socio-cultural

environment where Russian-speaking groups predominated in urban centers, while rural regions were characterized by underdeveloped infrastructure and limited economic opportunities. Consequently, adaptation was complicated both by competition in the labor market and by the need to integrate into a society shaped by long-standing social and regional asymmetries [Bokayev, 2011: 106–107].

An important dimension of these demographic shifts was spatial: new settlements and urban centers were established according to historical patterns of population distribution, while traditional nomadic routes and economic zones of the Kazakh population were transformed or partially dismantled. In the post-Soviet period, many repatriates were resettled in regions with underdeveloped infrastructure, reinforcing their peripheral status within the national socio-economic landscape [Khizat, 2015: 61–63]. These demographic developments not only altered the ethnic composition of the population but also generated long-term spatial and social imbalances that affected the adaptation of repatriates, limiting access to resources and compelling them to develop independent strategies for integration within an established hierarchical context.

Another key historical factor influencing repatriate adaptation is the legacy of bureaucratic structures inherited from previous administrative systems. The hierarchical organization of administrative and social processes, developed during the imperial and Soviet periods, continues to shape contemporary societal dynamics in Kazakhstan [Bokayev, 2011: 106–107]. In the Russian Empire, key administrative positions were typically held by representatives of central authorities, while local Kazakhs were largely limited to lower-level roles [Sultangalieva, 2015: 657–659]. This created a reliance on centralized structures and reinforced adherence to formal rules. During the Soviet period, the bureaucracy remained rigid, reinforced by ideological control and standardization, which often constrained the role of local practices and traditions. For modern repatriates, these historical administrative patterns manifest as challenges in navigating state institutions, obtaining official documents, and accessing housing and employment [Bokayev, 2011: 106–107].

Such a bureaucratic structure reproduces the historical model of “external control,” in which new members of society are perceived as “outsiders” required to conform to formalized rules. This dynamic creates additional barriers to social integration and reinforces a sense of alienation. Considering the historical development of administrative systems helps to explain the underlying reasons for the difficulties ethnic Kazakhs face in integrating into contemporary society [Baigabatova, Sancak, 2018: 48–49].

Another important factor influencing adaptation is the challenge of a historically shaped cultural identity. Many ethnic Kazakhs who lived outside the republic, in countries such as China, Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkey, or Afghanistan, preserved their language, customs, and traditions, but often in relative isolation from the broader Kazakh cultural space. Consequently, their cultural practices sometimes retained archaic features or became mixed with elements of the host countries’ cultures [Shaken, 2023: 185–187].

Upon returning to Kazakhstan, these differences often generated cultural discrepancies. Some repatriates spoke archaic dialects of Kazakh, while others had lost proficiency in the language entirely, using the languages of their countries of residence instead. For some, national identity was primarily linked to Islamic traditions, whereas in Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakhstan, a more secular and urbanized model of cultural self-awareness had developed. These contrasts sometimes led to misunderstandings or latent tensions between local and newly arrived Kazakhs.

Cultural differences also affected self-perception: repatriates often saw themselves as “closer to authentic Kazakh traditions,” while some local Kazakhs viewed them as “backward” or “different”. This resulted in a form of double marginality, in which repatriates were not fully integrated either into the society they returned to or the one they had left.

The factor of cultural distinctiveness thus had an ambivalent effect. On one hand, it complicated integration and reinforced social boundaries; on the other, it served as a foundation for reviving traditional language, customs, and religious practices, enriching Kazakhstan’s contemporary cultural landscape.

Finally, internal divisions within the Kazakh ethnic group emerge as a synthesis of these historical barriers. Social hierarchy, economic marginality, bureaucratic structures, demographic patterns, and cultural distinctions combine to position repatriates as a distinct subgroup within their own ethnicity. They differ from the local population in language, habits, social status, and cultural outlook, which contributes to internal segregation [Shaken, 2004: 32–35].

This internal divide manifests on multiple levels: socio-economic (peripheral positions and limited access to resources), cultural-psychological (differences in language, traditions, and perceptions), and institutional (bureaucratic procedures and established administrative practices). Together, these factors show that adaptation is not merely a process of integration but also an effort to navigate and reconcile internal

ethnic and cultural boundaries shaped by historical experience, social conditions, and institutional mechanisms.

Conclusion. Thus, the analysis of repatriate adaptation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan demonstrates that this process cannot be examined in isolation from its historical context. Past social, economic, and institutional developments have shaped specific societal structures and cultural patterns that continue to influence contemporary Kazakhstan. For this reason, the difficulties faced by ethnic Kazakhs returning to their historical homeland are not incidental but deeply rooted in historical experience.

The key factors influencing adaptation include language barriers, social hierarchy, demographic patterns, the legacy of bureaucratic structures, and variations in cultural identity. Each of these elements has historical origins, yet together they create a system of constraints that produces internal divisions within the Kazakh ethnos. In this context, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a marker of social status, while economic marginality and bureaucratic challenges reinforce feelings of exclusion and peripheral positioning.

At the same time, these factors cannot be considered solely negative. Cultural distinctiveness and the preservation of traditional practices have allowed repatriates to contribute to the renewal of Kazakhstan's cultural landscape. The revival of elements of national identity preserved outside the country may, over time, become an important resource for strengthening cultural diversity and social cohesion. In this way, repatriates both face integration challenges and contribute actively to the formation of a contemporary Kazakh identity.

The role of the state and civil society is particularly important. Policies supporting repatriates, including educational programs, bilingual environments, and recognition of qualifications and professional experience, can significantly ease adaptation. Engagement with local communities and participation in civic initiatives and cultural projects foster dialogue and reduce social distance.

Finally, repatriates maintain transnational connections with the historical diaspora, which broadens Kazakhstan's cultural and intellectual horizons, deepens regional ties, and fosters networks of shared memory. The adaptation of repatriates is thus a complex, multilayered process in which historical legacies intersect with contemporary challenges. Understanding this duality allows for more effective strategies to support integration through linguistic, cultural, and institutional initiatives while promoting equal opportunities for all social groups.

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МАЗМҰНЫ/ СОДЕРЖАНИЕ/CONTENT
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