

Demographic Change and Mobility in The East Kazakhstan Region in the 1920s and 1930s

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Abstract

This paper explores the demographic indicators of the East Kazakhstan region, formed as a result of the political campaigns in 1920-1930 period, especially forced migration and the confiscation carried out within the framework of the collectivisation policy, as a result of which the severe famine that took place considerably affected the decline in the population of East Kazakhstan. The historical fate of the Kazakhs who were resettled outside the border and in neighbouring countries and died as a result of famine in those years are discussed. We have used comparative-historical data to explore the region's demography and forced migration.

Keywords: *Collectivisation; population; famine; mass migration; confiscation campaign; refugees*

Introduction

The 1920s and 1930s in Kazakhstan, including the eastern region, were marked by contradictory events that tormented the population with political campaigns. Confiscation measures, mistakes, and excesses made at that time, and their severe consequence was large-scale displacement of the Kazakh people from their native land. The interconnected political emergency campaigns carried out in Kazakhstan, in particular, the confiscation of meat and grain preparations, forced collectivisation, and the policy of instilling a sedentary lifestyle, finally destroyed conventional animal husbandry. As a result, the policy carried out, ignoring the established features of traditional animal husbandry and the natural and historical situation for centuries, led to the mass death of the Kazakh people. A serious consequence of the destruction, the tragic conclusion of conventional animal husbandry was the irretrievable loss of people. This was especially affected by the confiscation campaign, crossing the border of another state, and the mass migration of Kazakhs. Due to the policy of famine, many people died, and forced fleeing brought a demographic disaster to the people of Kazakhstan (Kasymova, 2002; Zhandabekova, 1998).

The specifics of the demographic evolution of the Kazakh people, especially in 1920-1930, and the political situation in the 20th century as a whole had a negative impact on their quantitative and qualitative growth. The geopolitical situation of Kazakhstan also influenced such demographic processes. Migration processes and death caused by the famine of the 20th century led to a small population of the studied region, and therefore to the threat of complete disappearance of the Kazakh people on their land. This problem is considered in the study

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within the framework of historiography, as well as source studies. Also, it is estimated that migration studies with economic focus and some health research overall draw more attention than others (Sirkeci et al., 2017). In recent years there has been a growing number of studies reclaiming the importance of ethnic boundaries in defining the experience of migration (Féron, 2020; Chernobay, 2021; Sabluk, 2021). However, the previously mentioned issue of the disappearance of the Kazakh people on their own land certainly requires in-depth research in the regional aspect. A small historical digression will help to see that at the end of the 19th century, that is, in 1897, the first population census conducted by the Russian Empire showed that the population was 4.084,000 people (The first All-Union..., 1897; Sydykov, 2010; Balaniuk and Ivaniuk, 2020). And the census of 1926 in the Kazakhstan Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR) amounted to 6530528 people (All-Union Population..., 1926).

It is known that the issues of political repression of the 20th century, famine, collectivisation policy, diaspora, and demographic situation are productive research areas. Many dissertations and monographs have been written on these topics, and scientific schools have been established. In this study, the methodological principles of these works were taken as a basis. Concerning the demographic policy of the 20th century, in the studies of Asylbekov and Galiev (1991) and Mendikulova (2006), migration policy and its consequences are characterised by dynamic indicators. Works of Omarbekov (1997), Kozybayev, Abylkhozhin, and Aldazhumanov (1992) are devoted to the Soviet policy, which brought the demographic disaster to the Kazakh people and its history.

The demographic problem is an issue that arises in certain periods. The population will never be stable, it will always change depending on the situation both in the country and around the world (Perga, 2020). This problem cannot be solved completely, it can only be corrected for a while but after a certain period of time, it will make itself felt again. Even in the current time, many countries are puzzled by the question of demography. According to experts, over the past 10 years, the world's population has significantly decreased. Last year, the coronavirus pandemic appeared on the world "podium", which reduced the world's population by 1147062 people (out of the officially recorded ones).

In addition, one of the most popular demographic problems in 2020 was the problem of overpopulation. In some countries, the number of people per square millimetre is up to 10 times higher than the permissible norm. This situation leads to a dead-end for the state, which is trying to improve the situation through prohibitions and restrictions, which, as a result, do not give anything. Due to overpopulation, another very important problem has entered the arena – a lack of resources. The formula "the more people, the more resources are used" always works correctly, which is why some countries are sounding the alarm – they simply do not know where to get resources for the normal life support of citizens (Saadulaev, 2021). Therefore, the demographic issue has always been and will be solved only by half. The purpose of the paper is to study the demographic situation of the East Kazakhstan region in the 20-30s of the 20th century.

Materials and methods

The explanatory method was used to fill the gaps in explaining something occurring when limited information is available. The historical factors affecting demographic processes were considered comprehensively. In this paper, the main guiding task was that the authors investigated the chosen topic, relying on the historical relevance, and reliability of the issue,



as well as on the values of civilisations and a joint methodology for studying history. In addition, methods of intrasubject communication were used to cover the scientific nature of the research.

The actual basis of the research work was made up of archival and documentary sources, statistical collections, resolutions, and decisions of the Soviet government, as well as legislative documents that directly influenced the political process of the 20th century, in particular, 1 and 3 funds of the museum of the city of Semey VKO. The documents of the funds MM 38 VKO (Zaisan District Committee of the All-Union Communist Bolshevik Parties), 788 (Zaisan District Executive Committee of the Council of Deputies of Workers, Peasants, and Red Army Soldiers) characterise the period of the disastrous demographic situation in the eastern region of Kazakhstan. Collections of documents “Unknown pages of the history of the Semipalatinsk Irtysh region (20-30 years of the 20th century)” (Kasymova, 2002), “Secrecy. Migration of Kazakhs to China during the period of collectivisation. Re-emigration. 1928-1957” (Zhandabekova, 1998) include evidence regarding the historical destinies of Kazakhs who migrated abroad in the 20-30s of the 20th century. In the collected book “Driven by hunger. Collection of documents” (Sydykov, 2010) in the complex of facts, there is information about the situation of Kazakhs who died from severe famine and migrated to neighbouring countries in 1931-1933, subsequently resulting in a demographic disaster.

Currently, a lot of facts have been discovered regarding issue, which are at the stage of introduction into scientific circulation. To increase the scientific and documentary value of the issue, the contribution of the archival fund of the region is especially valuable. It is also worth noting that many documents are not yet defined and are inaccessible due to some aspects of Soviet policy.

Findings and discussion

On August 27, 1928, a resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the Kazakh ASSR and the Soviet People's Commissariat was adopted “On the confiscation of the property of large rich farms and partial feudal lords and exile”. The resolution says that the Republic of Kazakhstan is a culturally retrogressive nation in its composition, which, without changes, leads to a nomadic lifestyle. The owners and former socially preferential groups of Kazakhstan prevent the Soviet authorities from holding major events in auls and villages, spread inflammatory agitation, and sow interethnic and intergenerational disagreement. This primarily keeps the poor economically dependent and hinders their cultural development (Center for documentation of the recent history of the East Kazakhstan region, fund 74, list 3, case 7, p. 68).

First of all, the rich kulaks migrated, who, to save their cattle and property, were forced to cross the border of other states. On March 22, 1928, in a message from the secretary of the Zaisan District Committee Savchenko to a member of the Provincial Committee Reznikov, the mass migration of Kazakhs to China is described as follows: “The rich people of the municipalities of Kuzeun, Khabarsu, Tarbagatai, Maykapshagai, Alkabek persuaded the Kazakhs to migrate to China. Several rich people have already migrated to China. 27 refugees were detained and arrested by border guards. Livestock and property were described, confiscated. The strongest agitation of the rich was carried out”. In document No. 4 (Zaisan ACC) of The State Archive of the East Kazakhstan region, the Zaisan border cavalry detachment, in its message dated August 21, 1928, indicated: “On the night of August 16, the

citizens of 4 villages of the Zaisan district migrated to China. This group, consisting of 65 families, was headed by the chairman of the union “Qosşy” Daumenov Nauryzbay and a member of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth Union Zhanpeisov Kasym, and were armed” (State Archives of the East Kazakhstan region, fund 338-P, list 1, case 188, p. 29).

Clearly, the rich people were at the head of the migration abroad, but they were supported and organised by the communists. During the confiscation, the number of people who migrated abroad increased, and therefore a strict and urgent task was given in the cypher programme intended for the border regions of Bakhty, Zaisan, and Zharkent: “From the first of September, the campaign of confiscation of the rich comes into force. Your task is to detain the crowd of rich people as much as possible” (Kasymova, 2002).

Information from the Zaisan district executive committee chairman on December 20, 1928: “According to the available materials, 14 farms ran across the border, eight of them returned”. 29.130 cattle from 14 farms migrated to China. The union “Qosşy” has 574 heads of cattle, 105 heads have been sold, and there is a shortage of 72 heads (VKO GAVKO, 3 fund, list 1, case 38, p. 7). In fact, most of the cattle were left with the rich who crossed the border. According to the results of the mass migration in 1930, the following farms migrated from three areas bordering China during the year: Zaisan district – 1238, Markakol district – 61, Tarbagatay district – 417. Total – 1716. Information about the detention of farms from these three districts by border detachments when crossing the border: Zaisan district – 518, Markakol district – 21, Tarbagatai district – 221. Total – 760. These areas are located near the border, which has become crucial for saving people’s lives (Koigeldiyev, Omarbekov, 1993). According to the information of the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), given in April 1930, the exact number of the migrated population from 3 districts:

- In the Makanshin district in February – 33 poor farms, 39 middle-class farms, 6 rich farms; In March – 191 farms, all collective farmers. In total, 269 farms migrated.
- In the Zaisan district in February – 135 poor, 127 middle-class, 38 rich farms. In March – 47 poor, 114 middle-class, 42 rich farms. Total – 503 farms. A total of 772 farms migrated from two districts.
- For the Tarbagatai district (incomplete information). In February – 33 rich, 10 middle-class, 13 poor farms.

The reason for these migrations was mainly a campaign of confiscation of meat preparations and an excessive increase in the amount of taxes (VKO GAVKO, 3 fund, list 1, 209 case, p. 60). For the prevention of such lawlessness and violence (KazOAK – Kazakh Central Executive Committee), on April 3, 1930, the KCEC issued a resolution “On measures to combat the illegal relocation of the farms of rich kulaks from the areas bordering with China”, which included the following issues:

1. Those intending to migrate in the following situations should be resettled 100 kilometres from the borderline:
 - a) all rich kulaks detained when crossing the border lines or negotiating to cross the border;
 - b) when crossing the border, if the family stayed and the leaders migrated.



2. In all cases, migration is approved by the resolution of the regional executive committee based on the materials of the district executive committee and the border guard service (VKO GAVKO, 778 fund, 1 list, 38a case, p. 13).

Despite the adoption of this resolution, the population did not pay attention to it. Having created groups, it was engaged in banditry, helped those crossing the border, those who were unwilling were forcibly taken out. The author stated above that in 1929-1930, during the campaign to exterminate the rich and the kulaks as a class, after the above injustices established by local Soviet bodies, mass migration of the middle peasants and the poor to China began. Those who moved to China earlier noticed that there is no persecution and division into rich and poor on this side. They continuously informed their relatives about this, inviting them to move to their new home. And this convinced some Kazakhs of the border regions to cross the border of China at all costs. As one of the illustrations of this phenomenon – in 1930, a telegram to the local history committee of the department of the Makanshin district OGPU reported on the migration of the local population to China and indicated the social composition, material status of the population: “In the period of April 20-25, the Kazakhs migrated: middle-class – 5 farms, 27 persons, the number of cattle – 10 horses, 25 large cattle, 92 – small cattle, 1 camel. Poor farms – 27, 127 persons, 19 horses, the number of cattle – 65, small cattle – 86, 2 camels” (VKO GAVKO, fund, 2 list 1583 case, p. 88). From these data, a picture of mass migration in 1930 emerges.

In 1930, collective farms began to be created as a result of collectivisation. Those who joined the collective farms were mostly middle-class and poor people. One of the migrations in 1930 happened on July 11: at night, 10 collective farmers crossed the Chinese border through the Maikapshagai outpost, one of them is a middle-class, the remaining 9 are poor. According to the composition of cattle – 12 horses, 14 – large cattle, 22 – small cattle. On the night of July 26, 50 farms passed through the same site to China. The number of cattle was not established. According to available information, armed Kazakhs came from China to help them (VKO GAVKO, 1 fund, list 1, 1583 case, p. 14). The actions of people from the other side of the border aimed at helping their relatives were assessed as “robbery actions”. The migration from their native lands did not stop in 1931. In August 1931, 2.5-3 thousand farms gathered from different areas located near the Ayagoz near the Chinese border, on the bank of the Emil river with 15-20 thousand cattle, intending to cross the border. However, having discovered these movements, the executioners of the OGPK detained the Kazakhs, stopping the caravan and trying to bring them back. Most of the caravan managed to cross the river. The leaders of the shifting groups mainly consisted of the elders of the clans, mullahs, and rich kulaks who were armed and ready for an armed clash (Mendikulova, 2006).

Until the end of 1929, the actions of those who violated the borders and migrated to China were assessed as a mass migration of the rich. The OGPU authorities did not attach much importance to this and did not consider it necessary to put them on a special account. Still, at the beginning of 1930, it gradually became known that collective farmers and the poor were massively migrating to China. Information was received from operational intelligence from February 1932 about the conditions of refugees in Western China. In connection with the order to deport the emigrants back, the mood of the Kazakh emigrants was depressed, in addition, they were categorically against returning back. The rich emigrants mostly intended to settle down and were interested in obtaining a residence permit in China.

The groups of emigrants from the poor and middle-class heard rumours about the issuance of a permit for free residence on the territories of the USSR, so they still intended to return to Kazakhstan in the spring (Omarbekov, 1992). The message of the Zaisan border detachment to the chairman of the district executive committee Mukhamedshin reports the essence openly: On November 30, 1929, from the Altai region of China, an armed group of 30 people led by Nurgaliy Mukabayev attacked and forced 60 families to migrate. Near Kergantas, the “gang” of Mukan Masalimov took away 40 families. In January 1930, 128 farms (consisting of 582 people, 4421 cattle) migrated through the Sauyr mountains to the principality of Alen. The people of Alen helped to move. In the same year, on January 16, then on January 28, people living in Tangyt Ukidai, China, moved 80 farms. In February, led by Konyrkazy Mazhitayev, 100 armed men took away 97 farms. On February 6-10, 100 farms crossed over to the other side of the border through Shagan. On February 11, 30 families crossed the border on the bank of the Alkabek River, having engaged in a shootout with border guards. On February 17, 93 farms crossed the border through the Sauyr Mountains. In the Akkezen district, on February 20, 160 farms, and on February 24, 60 families violated the border. One border guard was killed in a shootout. In the spring, the migration of the population continued. On March 15, 1930, the heads of the border detachments reported that 300 families with 8,600 heads of cattle passed through the Daryn outpost, 1260 families with 1.840 heads of cattle passed through the outpost near the village of Zhemeney, 240 families with 6.000 heads of cattle moved in the direction of the Kabyk Mountains, 600 families with 14200 heads of cattle in the Dorbilzhinsky district crossed the border. Suspects in the leadership of the migration of the population from this and that side of the border – 29 people in the Altai region, a person in the Zhemeneysky district, 25 people in the Derbilzhinsky district have been identified by name, lists have been compiled (Baybatyrov, 2003). It can clearly be seen that migration touched various groups of Kazakh people.

The Kazakhs who migrated for one year belonged to the Zaisan district. Besides it, the population of many other border regions was also saving themselves by migrating from their native lands. The reasons for these migrations were also different. For example, in 1931, 170 farms managed to migrate from the Kurchum district to China, 30 of them were rich farms, the rest were poor and middle-class. Among those who migrated were 5 Communists and 9 Komsomol members. These Communists and Komsomol members were members of the migrated ancestral farms. From the above archival documents, it is evident that in the period 1928-1931, the decrease in the population of the region was influenced by the migration abroad of residents dissatisfied with the policy of confiscation in the border areas.

Paying attention to the social composition of those who have migrated, it can be seen that there are rich, middle-class, and poor people among them. That is, the phenomenon had a mass character. The size of the disaster that took place in 1931-1933 in Kazakhstan is accurately reflected in the report of KazKHSHEB (Department of National Economic Accounting of Kazakhstan) on the dynamics of the rural population in 1930-1936: 1930 – 5,873.0 thousand people, 1931 – 5,114.0 thousand people, 1932 – 3,227.0 thousand people, 1933 – 2,493.5 thousand people, 1934 – 2,681.8 thousand people, 1935 – 2,926.0 thousand people, 1936 – 3,287.9 thousand people. In 1930-1936, the rural population of Kazakhstan decreased by 2,585.1 people.

The historian T. Omarbekov (1997) in his writings determined that in 1929-1930, the population of Kazakhstan in the areas bordering China decreased by about 87.000 people,



and according to the OGPU, until January 1, 1932, the population of Kazakhstan that migrated to Western China was 60,000 people. M. Kozybayev, Zh. Abylkhozhin, and K. Aldazhumanov (1992) claim that in China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and Iran, 200,000 refugees did not return to Kazakhstan, stayed to live there. During the famine years, 1130 thousand people left the republic, 676 thousand of them did not return, 454 thousand people later returned to Kazakhstan (Mulik-Aydar, 2019). As a result, it was established that in 1931-1933, about half (49-52%) of the population died as a result of famine, and up to 2.2 million people became victims of famine (more than 1 million 725 thousand Kazakhs). A well-known scientist who studied the topic of famine in 1931-1933, K. Aldazhumanov (2013) claims that the OGPU workers were conscientiously engaged in collecting information, and relying on their information, in 1931-1933 the republic lost 2 million 531 thousand people. And there is a possibility that this is incomplete information.

Conclusions

It is clear that in Kazakhstan, which occupies the ninth place in the world by area, the main problem is certainly the human resource. For a state located in a complex geopolitical zone, the reclamation of a huge space, its protection, and its possession are measured by the population and directly affect the specific weight of the nation that makes up the state. Studying the pronounced demographic crisis in independent Kazakhstan, the political process of 1920-1930 should be mentioned. In general, in Kazakhstan, including the eastern region, the main issue is the demographic situation, especially the issues of reducing the population of the border areas of the region, which are a consequence of the past century's policies.

The following conclusions on the study are offered. Firstly, after the establishment of Soviet power, mass protests were organised against the implementation of the collectivisation policy. This soon developed into a nationwide phenomenon. In the eastern region of Kazakhstan, this was expressed by migration abroad. At that time, part of the Kazakh diaspora abroad was replenished at the expense of those Kazakhs who left during that period. The migration includes the period of 1928-1931. Secondly, in 1931-1933, after the policy of collectivisation and the disastrous famine, there was a mass death of Kazakhs, which brought a considerable change in the population of villages and cities. This is discussed in archival documents and information gleaned from the memories of eyewitnesses. Thirdly, fleeing from hunger, the Kazakhs who fled to neighbouring countries directly influenced the creation of a small group of Kazakhs in their native land. A significant difference in the population, and the low proportion of the Kazakh people in Kazakhstan can be seen in the data of the censuses conducted in 1926 and 1939.

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