

# The Taste of Native Land in Everyday Practices of Repatriates – Variations by the Countries of Origin (by Field Materials)

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**Abstract**—Practices of food sharing as part of the brotherhood and hospitality interpretation have been essential part of the Kazakh ethnic culture since early times. Dialogue in time and space between Kazakhs through differences in food interpretation among the ethnic repatriates may become a link connecting them and platform for stable relations with the host society or serious barrier on the way of their integration in the Kazakhstani society. The article elucidates by the field materials how some aspects of food culture differences among ethnic Kazakhs living abroad (XUAR of China) and ethnic repatriates in Kazakhstan may influence their integration path.

**Keywords**—Ethnic repatriation, food canon, Kazakh identity, oralman.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ETHNIC repatriation policy realities Kazakhs happened to live outside the territory of modern day Kazakhstan under various historical reasons and in different time periods. Since 1991 the government of Kazakhstan has been promoting the ethnic repatriation policy.

Ethnic Kazakhs – repatriates from China, Mongolia, Turkey and other countries of post-soviet Central Asia became the most numerous group of newcomers to Kazakhstan population (about 1 mln. from 1991 to 2012). They contributed to population statistical growth, but to great extent influence its cultural, economic and social development. Therefore, the studies of oralman's psychological adaptation in the Kazakhstani society are of great importance in terms of the Kazakhstani nation development prospects. On the other side, it is important to figure out the reasons of ethnic self-identification of oralman for the Kazakhs as the main state building ethnic group. Deliberate studies of the oralman's perceptions in the recipient community are also significant to upgrade the level of tolerance in the Kazakhstani community [1]. Repatriates make up integrity only statistically and by the declared strive to re-unite with the main body of the ethnic group, but vary by the arrival date, qualitative collective and individual characteristics, residence localization and countries of origin.

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The article studies the problem of similarity and differences among Ethnic Return Migrants and mother ethnic group exemplified by interpretation of food practices differences and similarities. Food practices are seen as a discourse between the oralman and Kazakhstani society. How they can work for bringing them together or alienate? Practices of food sharing as part of the brotherhood and hospitality interpretation have been essential part of the Kazakh ethnic culture since early times. Differences in food interpretation among the ethnic repatriates may become a serious barrier on the way of their integration in the Kazakhstani society. The article consists of introduction to the research methodology design, gives a literature review on ethnic Kazakh cultural practices maintenance among Kazakhs living abroad, then dwells on the background and cultural roots of the food vision, variation through time and space. The last part of the article explores the differences in food interpretation between various Kazakh groups.

## A. Research Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

Theory of social interactionism and phenomenological approach [2] became the basis of field works and data assessment. The research uses the qualitative sociology methods and is based on in-depth and expert interviews, narrative interview, questionnaires and included observation.

## B. Data Origin

For the research were interviewed repatriates from China living in Almaty, Almatinskaya oblast – villages around Almaty city (fall of 2011 – summer 2012), Kapal village near Taldy-Kurgan (fall of 2012) and Koktuma village on the Alakol lake (summer 2012), repatriates from Uzbekistan living in the village near Shymkent city (spring-summer 2012). Our team also made a trip for field materials on ethnic Kazakhs life in XUAR of China (December 2011). The article is based on the interpretation of 25 interviews (narratives of repatriates and ethnic Kazakhs in China). The interviews were conducted in Kazakh language, videotaped, in the homes of respondents or public places - cafes and restaurants (in case of Kazakhs in XUAR) in form of free conversation. The respondents were asked questions on their life course to figure out how they perceive their identity in the country of origin and Kazakhstan – vision of homeland, ethnic culture and traditions, external environment effects, readiness

to cultural exchanges and preferences. In case of the oralmen they were also asked on the changes in the personality and family developments since they came to ancestral land. The respondents told of what they eat, cooking techniques, table manners and rules, norms of guests' treatment, gender differences and taboos in food culture, and imports from the external environment.

National cuisine of any ethnic group is a history of its development – at very stage of its evolution it invented new type of dish and filled it with philosophical and moral content [3] that were materialized via techniques – how to master food, make it possible for consumption due to aesthetical, ethical, social and political limitations.

### *C. Literature on Kazakh Ethnic Identity Development*

Most of literature on Kazakhs living abroad was made within the political anthropology or nationalities frameworks to evaluate the status of ethnic Kazakhs as ethnic minorities within the host societies and the degree and rational of their identity maintenance in the light of the nationalization policies of the host regimes [4], [5], [6]. The issues on ethnic repatriation as governmental policy in the migration choices of ethnic Kazakhs and the resettlement models were made primarily within the transnationalist or state/nation building models perspectives [7], [8]. The cultural cleavages in mental mapping, moral and cultural arrangements derivatives of the lifestyle adaptation to the alien community and preservation of the traditional occupational models are analyzed in terms of language differences as the key to social mobility in Kazakhstan.

The article draws attention to the silenced publicly differences in the cultural practices between Kazakh groups in most important aspect for their existence- making food.

Historical-philosophical background Material culture of the ethnic group represents the materialized embodiment of aesthetical and rational mastering of the external world given through spatial-temporal forms [9]. Kazakh culture specifics is in coincidence of time and space that are reflected in things that surround people in everyday life, especially in way of living (attachment of functionality to things) and space zoning (by practical and symbolic significance and gender division) [10].

The practical aspect of the Kazakh material culture rests on its philosophical comprehension as the creation process as a dialectical unity of the idea and its materialization. The idea of the thing (what it is for, its form – aesthetics and pragmatism) and material (what the thing is made of) are subject to changes in time and space. The creation is an art, modality (as a tribute to necessity or limitations in time and space) and social requirement at the same time. Nomads perceived that the external world was organized in very complex way and that came out in how they represented it in cosmogonical images, structural organization of subworlds (This and the Other one), complex oral and applied arts, migration schemes and types of activities, political and social hierarchy, moral and aesthetical forms [3].

Material culture objects in Kazakh tradition represent the visual unfolding of the creation process. That is better illustrated by the attitude to food – what it is for, ways and stages of preparation and storage, eating rules and entertaining. Meat and dairy products preparation are given as a miniature of how the world was created by supernatural forces, given as an inspired gift, preserved, maintained and multiplied by numerous generations of ancestors, illuminated by personal charisma symbolism, animated by flora and fauna, rationally interpreted and embodied in the human activities products – cattlebreeding and derivative economic practices and forms of living space arrangement [11].

Through the differentiation between the types of cattle the nomads perceived their vision of how hierarchically the supreme world was constructed. Therefore, some animals were distinguished as most significant and esteemed, special forces and qualities were attached to them, definite erudition and skills were required to take care of them, a man was connected with some animals by special bonds (Kazakh heroic epics and folklore). Social-economic significance of animals was defined by possession of them, and the system of equivalent exchange – human life was equated in its social importance to certain number of cattle (the Jety Jargy legal code of Tauke khan as an example) [10].

Another example of practical embodiment of creation stages in the Kazakh material culture is interpretation of real and symbolic (social-economic and by energy nutrition value) of the animals' carcasses in chopping, cutting, slicing, cooking and guests treatment [12]. The chief guest is offered a head prepared by a special recipe; horsemeat and kazy are viewed as delicacy and are used for eating only on special occasions [13].

The husbandry products – meat and dairy – go through processing stages – slicing, salting, jerking, cooking, etc. – from the whole to its pieces, each being a concentrated expression of the whole one in miniature and various stages of its unfolding – smell, color, taste, qualities, significance and union – through food to nature (its forces) and ancestors.

### *D. Cultural Variations of Canon*

Canonized knowledge of food practices in the Kazakh culture - from sacral sacrifice to everyday practices that came from early times did not change in modern Kazakhs irrespective the countries they live in and intrusion of food practices of alien environment they have to co-exist with in time and space. We consider that what was until the Kazakhs were dissipated is canon, and variations came with time. From semantic meanings of canon Jan Assman interprets it as an instrument of orientation providing exact, reliable initial points and clear-cut directions [14]. Canonic forms expressed in traditions and culture by Assman are superimposed in form of external legislative regulation upon the systems of social communication and meaningful interpretations developing by their own innate laws (and "natural" in that sense). Assman applied usage of canon to investigate the mechanisms and means of cultural succession in four semantic clusters: 1)

scale, rule, criteria; 2) model, pattern; 3) rule, norm; 4) list, index.

Canonized knowledge is one of the major ethnic identity components of Kazakhs, and their visual attributes - cuisine and clothes nowadays act as external ethnic guiding lines that are attached special symbolic significance for outward communication and times linking - recognition of the senior generation by the younger one and preservation of ancestral legacy [3].

Political and social-economic processes in the countries where Kazakhs are living in the XX century cardinally limited the opportunities for visual representation of ethnic culture. The Kazakhs in China and Mongolia engaged in nomadic cattle breeding preserved until present almost all components of the traditional lifestyle and food preparation techniques, while in the soviet Kazakhstan the term "cattlebreeding" was replaced by "animal husbandry" and the forms of nomadic way of life were transformed by force.

But food practices and clothes as various stages of the material readiness of Kazakhs of Mongolia and China underwent some transformation conditioned by narrow ideological and political frameworks the ethnic group has to live in and adaptation specifics to nature and climate. Kazakhs of China in pre-reform era could afford visually define the female clothes – bright camisoles and dresses, while men were obliged to wear Mao type jacket. Kazakh subculture in the enormous mosaic of the Sinocentric canvass occupies a limited space as part of the nomadic culture, and through a tight corridor controlled by the authorities is given canals to express its uniqueness. Therefore, they have to be very careful and correspond the regime requirements and at the same time to preserve ethnic culture (but only some aspects). During the field trip to Urumchi (XUAR, China) our group visited cultural-entertainment center "Almaly" with the Kazakh style cultural program (as we looked forward to) [15]. But the latter one demonstrated how strong is the pressure of external limitations. Kazakh song performance was preceded by a long explanation of its content in the Chinese language. The song was split into three parts each performed in Uyghur, Chinese and Kazakh languages.

Europeanized clothes by various degrees replaced the traditional garments for males and females in the countries where Kazakhs currently reside in. Kazakhs living in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran accommodated their exterior to the Islamic society requirements. Objects of traditional Kazakh culture - yurt and furniture in it, clothes and footwear, dishes, most of the decorations are being employed in Kazakhstan for purposes of symbolic decorations of ethnic representations. Most of them have been "modernized" even since soviet times, but after 1991 multi-vectored "revival" tendencies in handling materials culture objects are commercialized depending on economic and political situation [16].

In modern day Kazakhstan external indications of Kazakhness in form of camisoles and robes /chapans are commercialized: 1) as a sphere of production and sale (made

in China or by the oralmans); 2) symbolic gift exchanges as tribute to tradition and a token of respect to the guest by his age and rank; 3) visual representation of the ongoing competition to establish monopoly on Kazakh canon revival.

Ethnic repatriates are mostly Europeanized, but interpretation of external indicators of Kazakhness in clothes – decorations, camisoles' styles, color range, etc. – vary due to the countries of origin.

Food practices and especially meat consumption changed radically (types – beef, horsemeat, chicken, frequency of making meat dishes or substitution of meat by vegetables or poultry), but symbolic significance attached to different pieces of meat and treatment of guests according to their status still matter.

#### *E. Canon Symbolism in Food and Its Interpretation*

During the trip to XUAR (December 2011) we observed that Chinese Kazakhs paid only symbolic tribute to meat, and preferred it to vegetables and rice. The meat cooking techniques differed from the Kazakhstani ones greatly – meat is sliced and seasoned with the Chinese spices and other herbal ingredients (strong influence of the Asian recipes). The matter is not only in the urgent need for Kazakhs to accommodate the external environment and through mimicry master and absorb culinary practices, but in pragmatic and commercial attitude to meat consumption. Some of our respondents explained that spicy food saves them from cold in frosty times, and fights with various microbes. Others reasoned that meat is not expensive in China but the life cost grows, and Kazakh cattlebreeders tend to sell more meat limiting its consumption to cover other expenditures.

Kazakhs in Uzbekistan by our observations and interviews considerably cut meat consumption and most of their dishes are of vegetables, flour and rice. High cost of life in Uzbekistan, and prices on meat work as external factors for food practices shift. Pilaf is major dish – everyday and on special occasions – for Kazakhs from Uzbekistan.

Technical design of the food practices – cooking and consumption discern among the repatriates from different countries.

In the XUAR trip we asked local Kazakhs what restaurants or cafes they prefer visiting and the answer was: «Those with Muslim cook». They supported their statement by the argument: "Muslim cook does not touch pork, and cooks out the meat of an animal slaughtered by Islamized Kazakh practices. But food consumption technique changed – Kazakhs of China use sticks instead of spoons and forks, and do not drink tea, unlike Kazakhs of Kazakhstan that are fond of black tea with milk, and the Uzbekistani ones prefer green tea.

We asked a young male oralman from China: "Why don't you use European cutlery for eating?" His answer shocked us by its inner logic: "Those are not our practices. The Chinese better suit the Kazakh eating manners and train logic, attentiveness and massage fingers".

For oralmans food taste specifics - pork or not- are of

serious matter, while transition to the Chinese eating manners – with sticks and strong spices – they do not view as violation from the Islamic norms and identity markers. But the normal practice of Kazakhs in Islamic societies - pray to Allah and thank the ancestors for food giving before the dish taking and wiping a face by hands after the meal is over, the Chinese Kazakh do not perform. When we asked that question, they responded that in public it is not welcomed by the regime, but in home places they pay symbolic tribute to ancestors after the special ceremonies and commemorations. But their ancestors' respondents in China said, are in their memories – recorded-shezhire/genealogies and memorized competence of ones clan and family tree out of seven generation of ancestors.

We asked oralmen what are their likings in the local menu and interpretation of the local Kazakhs' food practices. Our respondent from China told that he does not like most of is served, as local Kazakhs prepare many salads with sausages and mayonnaise probably made of pork or not "clean meat". He still did not shift to forks from sticks and this is one more reason why he does not visit many local houses. Oralmen from China do not buy meat in the bazaars ("not clean"), and slay the cattle on their own.

But by our observation, oralmen from China and Uzbekistan slowly shift to some types and recipes of local dishes, because they cannot find the substitutes to those they used to consume in the countries of origin. Import of food ingredients is quite expensive if they live far from the border or in urban centers. One of our respondents, an elderly oralman woman from China treated us with jam and tomato spicy seasoning, and assured that they were made by local recipes remarking that she did not make jam before arrival to Kazakhstan, and finds it very tasty. But her son obviously demonstrated his longing of the spicy food, and shared his plans to open next summer on the Alakol lakeshore a café. He would cook Chinese dapanji by his "special firm recipe".

## II. CONCLUSION

Temporal and spatial adaptation practices changed external revelations of the ethnic food practices, but understanding, decoding and implementation of their innate meanings as orientations in the outward world are still maintained. Food is not only means for survival and originality expression, but an invisible bridge between the past and the future, the world of ancestors and future generations. Respect to food, observance of the major rules of its preparation and interpretation of its social significance did not change among Kazakhs from various countries. While living in modern Kazakhstan, the oralmen smooth down the food cultural practices by exchange, reconciliation with the limits and deficit, tolerance and strive to be like locals and through interpretation of the cultural meanings content.

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