

**A PROFILE OF RURAL LIFE IN KAZAKSTAN, 1994-
1998:**

Comments and Suggestions for Further Research

Cynthia Werner
Texas A&M University



The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research
910 17th Street, N.W.
Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20006

TITLE VIII PROGRAM

Project Information*

Principal Investigator: Cynthia Werner
Council Contract Number: 815-17g
Date: June 16, 2000

Copyright Information

Scholars retain the copyright on works they submit to NCEEER. However, NCEEER possesses the right to duplicate and disseminate such products, in written and electronic form, as follows: (a) for its internal use; (b) to the U.S. Government for its internal use or for dissemination to officials of foreign governments; and (c) for dissemination in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act or other law or policy of the U.S. government that grants the public access to documents held by the U.S. government.

Additionally, NCEEER has a royalty-free license to distribute and disseminate papers submitted under the terms of its agreements to the general public, in furtherance of academic research, scholarship, and the advancement of general knowledge, on a non-profit basis. All papers distributed or disseminated shall bear notice of copyright. Neither NCEEER, nor the U.S. Government, nor any recipient of a Contract product may use it for commercial sale.

* The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract or grant funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, funds which were made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (The Soviet-East European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the author.

Executive summary

In the post-Soviet period, research on Central Asia has shifted in directions that reflect new geopolitical realities. Studies of Caspian energy resources, drug trafficking and organized crime, the development of democratic institutions, and the potential threats of Islamic extremism and secular nationalism have all proliferated. Other themes – such as poverty, social stratification, health, education and environmental problems – have been pursued as Central Asian nations have become recipients of international development aid.

Most of these studies of Central Asia focus on macro-level processes and/or urban populations, and there are few accounts of micro-level conditions in rural Central Asia. This paper addresses this gap by providing a general overview of the everyday life and daily struggles of Kazaks living in Shauldir village, Southern-Kazakstan *oblast*. It gives special attention to the economic and social costs of the post-Soviet transition in rural Kazakstan, and concludes by suggesting a number of areas for further research.

From a Soviet Marxist perspective, the region of Central Asia was considered to be one of the least developed and least integrated regions of the Soviet Union. Prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia was regarded in the West as a case study that could reveal both the limitations and the reach of the Soviet colonial enterprise. Western scholars measured the “success” of Soviet transformation by analyzing improvements in the economy, education, and health care, as well as changes in fertility rates, ethnic identification, religious affiliation, and native-language use (Rywkin 1982; Rumer 1989; Fierman 1991; Olcott 1987; Lubin 1984).

In the post-Soviet period, research interests have shifted in several new directions that reflect new geopolitical realities. In particular, a number of scholars are pursuing topics that relate to U.S. national security concerns, such as access to Caspian energy resources (Forsythe 1996; Luong-Jones and Weinthal 1999), the problems of drug trafficking and organized crime, the development of democratic institutions (Ruffin and Waugh 1999) and the potential threats of Islamic extremism and secular nationalism (Ro'i 1995; Haghayeghi 1994; Khazanov 1995). Further, as post-Cold War politics transform the Central Asian nations into the recipients of international development aid, Western scholars and development workers are becoming increasingly concerned with humanitarian issues, such as increased poverty and social stratification (Bauer et al. 1997; Bauer et al. 1998; Falkingham et al. 1997), decreased health and education expenditures (Klugman et al. 1996), and persistent environmental problems (Glantz 1999).

Despite the proliferation of new materials on post-Soviet Central Asia, most studies focus on macro-level processes and/or urban populations. There are relatively few accounts of micro-level conditions in rural Central Asia (Kandiyoti 1998; Harris 1998). This paper addresses this gap in the literature, by providing a general overview of everyday life and the daily struggles of rural Kazaks living in Shauildir village, Southern-Kazakstan *oblast*. This paper gives special emphasis to the economic and social costs of the post-Soviet transition in rural Kazakstan. The concluding section suggests several areas for further research.

A brief history of Shauildir village

The village of Shauildir is located in Southern-Kazakstan *oblast*, formerly known as Shymkent *oblast*, approximately 180 kilometers northwest of the city of Shymkent. Since 1930, Shauildir has served as the administrative center for Otyrar *raion*, formerly known as Qyzylqum *raion*. While Shauildir is a large village (*auyl*), with a population of 8,200, Otyrar is a sparsely populated *raion*, with only 56,000 residents living in a total area of 1,806,000 square hectares (Otyrar regional statistics, 1994). The majority of residents reside in the eastern quarter of the *raion*, in over 50 villages that lie near the Syr Darya and Arys rivers. With the exception of remote nomadic camps, there are virtually no settlements in the western portions of the *raion*, which are occupied by the Qyzylqum Desert.

Archaeological and historical evidence suggests that humans have lived in this area for thousands of years (Olcott 1987; Grousset 1970). Most notably, archaeologists have excavated Scythian burial sites (circa 300 B.C.) and the ancient city of Otyrar (13th-15th centuries), a northern link of the Silk Road. In what is now Southern-Kazakstan *oblast*, nomadic pastoralists occupying the steppes and deserts have long coexisted with settled peoples in towns, such as Otyrar, Turkestan and Shymkent.

Despite its proximity to ancient Otyrar (approximately 10 kilometers), the village of Shauildir did not exist until the early Soviet period. In the 1920s, the territory that is now Otyrar *raion* was nominally under the control of the nascent Soviet state. A single Soviet school was opened in the area and several agricultural artels and cooperatives were voluntarily formed by nomads. In 1929, Soviet rule in the area intensified with the beginning of the collectivization process (Argynbekov 1985).

It is somewhat ironic, though not unusual in the Soviet context, that the man who is now touted as the founder of the village, “Duisenbei Altynbekov,” was arrested in the 1937 as an “enemy of the people” and died in prison in 1943. Altynbekov was born in 1889 into a modest family of shepherds who lived near what is now Shauildir. As a child, he studied Arabic with a local mullah. Then, after his parents died in 1914, he took on the responsibility of looking after his seven younger siblings. Prior to the October Revolution, he and his siblings all moved to Tashkent where he began working as a baker. Seeking to improve the plight of the poor, he became active in the revolutionary movement. As a

revolutionary, he received a free education at the Tashkent Muslim professional-technical school (*technicum*), and then joined the Communist Party in 1927 (*Qyzylyqum* 1990).¹

In 1930, Altynbekov returned to his native land and led the construction of a new canal from the Arys River. The canal, later renamed after Altynbekov, provided the area with water, which was crucial for cultivating agricultural fields. In 1931, after the canal project was complete, five collective farms (*kolkhozi*) were organized in the region. In 1932, another five collective farms were constructed, the railway was opened, and the first tractors arrived in the region. Throughout the 1930s, even more collective farms were formed in the region. Over the decades, these original collective farms were reorganized and renamed several times. And, in the 1950s and 1960s, dozens of small collective farms were combined to form nine larger state farms, or *sovkhozi* (*Qyzylyqum* 1990).

With its mixture of steppe and desert environments, the territory of Otyrar *raion* is well suited for nomadic pastoralism. Acknowledging this, the state farms in the region specialize in raising livestock, especially the coat-producing Astrakhan sheep (*qaraqul koi*). In addition to livestock, the collective and state farms in the region have also produced crops. Beginning in the 1930s, Soviet leaders decided to increase the region's agricultural profits by devoting some of the irrigated land to cotton production. The cotton crops, which relied heavily on water diverted from the Syr Darya and Aral rivers, contributed to a steady rise in the soil's saline levels. After nearly thirty years, the state farms in the region stopped growing cotton. The farms, however, continued to grow other crops, such as corn and melons.

The construction of *kolkhozi* in the 1930s was paralleled by the construction of other Soviet institutions. The first Soviet school in the region opened in 1926. Throughout the 1930s, more schools were built on the new collective farms. By 1939, there were 83 teachers instructing 1,890 students in four eight-year schools, twenty elementary schools and one boarding school (*Internat*) for orphans and shepherd children. At that time, only four of the teachers were women. The Soviet state also brought new medical services to the region. The first medical clinic opened in 1933, followed by a twenty-five bed hospital in 1936. The state also developed institutions for communication and culture. The regional

newspaper released its first issue in 1935. By 1945, the region was able to communicate by telephone and radio. And, in 1949, the regional library opened with a collection of over 500 books (*Qyzylqum* 1990).

By the 1990s, there were over 1,600 households and 8,200 residents in the village of Shauildir (Otyrar regional statistics, 1994). Although the size of Shauildir gives it the official designation of a village, or *auyl*, it is quite developed compared to other villages in Otyrar *raion*. The typical Kazak village contains only a few non-residential structures, such as the state farm office, a school, a health clinic, a library, and a bus stop. In contrast, administrative villages, such as Shauildir, are much more like small towns in terms of the public services they provide for their residents. Shauildir, for example, has several administration buildings, a post office, a police station, a fire station, a library, a pharmacy, three 10-year schools, two specialty schools (for sports and music), two nurseries, a technical institute, a central department store, a produce bazaar, a livestock bazaar, several bread and vegetables shops, a bread factory, an all-purpose hospital, a tuberculosis hospital, two museums (for history and literature), a cultural palace (with a large auditorium), a movie theatre, a hotel, and several restaurants. While the residents of other villages are generally employed by the state farms, many of the residents in Shauildir work for these other establishments.

Basic living conditions in Shauildir vary from household to household. Some residents live in one of the two-story apartment buildings that line the central village road, while the majority live in individual houses, scattered along several paved and unpaved roads. As the nomadic way of life was abandoned in the earlier half of the century, the houses that Kazaks now live in are permanent structures, made with brick and plaster walls, wooden floors, and corrugated tin roofs.² A typical house has four-six rooms, including an indoor kitchen, a wide hallway, and a formal guestroom. Most houses are inside a fenced compound that may also include one or more livestock and poultry pens, a vegetable garden, an outdoor kitchen, one or more wooden platforms (for sleeping and eating outside during the hot summer months), an outhouse, and a bathhouse. The typical size of these household compounds ranges from 0.15 to 0.20 hectares of land.

In Shauildir, all of the houses are connected to electrical wires, yet few are connected to telephone wires. With the benefit of electricity, many families enjoy radio and television broadcasts, as well as modern luxuries, such as refrigerators and basic electrical appliances. On the downside, the village as a whole does not have running water, so none of the homes enjoy the convenience or sanitation that accompanies modern plumbing. This is a familiar problem in Kazakhstan; indoor plumbing, in particular, is rarely found outside of urban apartment buildings. In Shauildir, access to drinking water varies from house to house. Some families have pump wells or artesian wells within their household compound, while others must walk several hundred yards to acquire drinking water with buckets and carts. According to local doctors, the quality of drinking water in the village also varies from source to source.

Over 96% of the residents in Shauildir are Kazak-speaking Kazaks (compared to a national average of about 48 percent). The minority ethnic groups include Russians, Tatars and Uzbeks (Otyrar regional statistics 1994). Beyond these ethnic differences, the Kazaks in Shauildir pay close attention to clan-based identities. In Otyrar *raion*, a significant majority of the population belongs to various patrilineages comprising the Qonghyrat tribe, or clan (*ru*), of the Middle Horde.³

Clan-based identities are particularly strong throughout southern *oblasts* of Kazakhstan. Kazak clan structure is reminiscent of the “segmentary lineage system” described in the Western anthropological literature. There are three levels of patrilineal affiliation, ranging from the most to the least inclusive. The most inclusive level of affiliation is the horde (*zhuz*), followed by the clan (*ru*) and then the patrilineage (interchangeably called *ru* or *ata*). There are three different hordes, approximately twenty different clans, and hundreds of lineages (Tatimov 1993; Baisheva 1991; Sadibekov 1994).⁴ With the exception of a few groups that remain outside of the clan structure, every Kazak is born into his or her father’s patrilineage, clan and horde. And, according to Kazak custom, every woman must marry outside of her patrilineage, though not outside of her clan or horde. In addition to affecting marriage choices, clan identities indirectly influence political and social life. Since each clan and patrilineage is roughly associated with a particular geographical area, clan-based affiliations provide one means to distinguish

“insiders” from “outsiders.” Many of the village “outsiders” are career-driven individuals who are willing to accept job assignments outside their native region. Women make up another group of “outsiders.” By custom, they always marry into a different patrilineage, and by practice, they sometimes marry into a different village or region.

For decades, the households in Shauldir have pursued complex strategies to make ends meet. Most households have combined the wages of at least one state employee with the domestic production of vegetables and livestock. Throughout rural Kazakhstan, livestock and poultry are important indicators of household wealth and well-being. At the end of 1993, the average household in Otyrar *raion* had 8.73 privately-owned sheep and goats, 1.45 cows, 0.33 horses, 0.03 camels, and 5.82 chickens (Werner 1998). In addition to providing food, livestock can be sold for cash and exchanged in the gift economy. The domestic production of vegetables and fruits varies greatly from one household to the next. While household assets in livestock and poultry generally correlate with wealth, household assets in vegetables and fruits relate more to the household water supply and household composition. Some households do not have adequate water supplies to maintain a garden and thus produce no vegetables and fruits, while others have enough water and enough workers to produce nearly enough for their household needs. The average vegetable garden consists of tomatoes, cucumbers, green onions, peppers and eggplant. Some households also produce grapes, apples, and melons.

Finally, nutritional levels vary both between and within households.⁵ Compared to poor households, the members of affluent households generally consume more calories, and their diets are more balanced, with greater percentages of meat, fruits and vegetables and smaller percentages of rice and bread.⁶ Within and between households, individuals who regularly make social visits to other households and who frequently attend life-cycle feasts tend to have higher nutritional levels than other individuals.⁷

“Post-Soviet transition” in Shauildir

Daily life in Shauildir village and Otyrar *raion* has been strongly affected by macro-level changes in the post-Soviet period. Since Kazakhstan achieved independence in 1991, the country has been in the midst of a dual transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy and from a one-party authoritarian system to a multi-party democratic system. In 1993, Kazakhstan introduced a new national currency, the *tenge*, and a comprehensive structural reform program. These reforms included the liberalization of prices for consumer goods; the reduction of state subsidies for transportation, housing and other services; the privatization of some state-owned enterprises and the downsizing of others. Throughout the transition process, Kazakhstan has decreased its dependence on Russia, while increasing its reliance on the international community for investment capital and development aid.

Although Kazakhstan has great economic potential, with vast oil and mineral reserves and a small but educated population, most households have not fared well economically in the post-Soviet period. Put simply, the dismantling of the Soviet welfare state has increased the costs of numerous goods and services that were previously subsidized. As elsewhere, the transition process in Shauildir has been characterized by a sharp decline in the average standard of living and a growing disparity between wealthy and poor households. In 1994, 1995 and 1998, most of the villagers I interviewed complained about increased unemployment, delayed salaries and high inflation.

Many families in Shauildir have been affected by the unemployment problem. Beginning with *perestroika* in the late 1980s, local state establishments were encouraged to become more accountable for their profits and expenditures. This policy intensified in the early and mid-1990s with the early stages of privatization. Many enterprises had little choice but to close down their operations or to take workers off of their payrolls. Initially, these policies affected Shauildir, the village with the highest employment level, more harshly than the other villages in Otyrar *raion*. This is because the state farms, the dominant employers in the smaller villages, did not dismiss their workers as early as the *raion*'s other state institutions. Several state employers in Shauildir, including the nurseries, the hospital and the bread factory, started to dismiss workers as early as 1993 and 1994. From 1990 to 1994, the percent of

unemployed adults in Otyrar *raion* remained the same (at about 40%), yet the percent of unemployed adults in Shauldir increased from 21% to 32.6%.⁸

This disparity changed, however, in 1997, when the nine state farms were fully privatized. Until then, the privatization process had not affected the employment on these farms. Although all of the farms had started to grant land parcels and livestock to eligible households and several had been restructured as “cooperatives,” state farm and cooperative farm workers continued to work as state employees until 1997, when the state and cooperative farms were completely disbanded. At this point, former state farm workers were officially redesignated as “private farmers,” whether or not they were actually working the land or raising livestock.

In Shauldir, men and women have been similarly affected by government layoffs. From 1990-1994, the number of jobs occupied by women and men decreased by 14.2% and 13.4% respectively (Otyrar regional statistics, 1990-1994).⁹ These figures do not coincide with employment statistics for Kazakstan as a whole, where the rise of unemployment among women greatly surpassed that of men. Between 1990 and 1994, the number of jobs occupied by women in Kazakstan decreased by 22.7%, compared to only 10.2% for men (Bauer, Boschmann and Green 1997). In Shauldir, another social group that has been disproportionately disadvantaged by the employment problem is young people. In numerous interviews, villagers mentioned that high school and college graduates now have fewer employment opportunities than before. And, as the number of available jobs dwindles, it is now more common for individuals to receive jobs through personal connections or illegal purchases than through merit.

Despite its relevance for measuring household welfare, employment in and of itself does not guarantee economic security in post-Soviet Kazakstan. Throughout the mid-1990s, state salaries for many occupations have been consistently delayed for months. Salary arrears for certain professions have been longer than for others. Teachers and doctors, for example, have often received their salaries several months after local policemen and bankers. In addition to delaying salaries, the state in some cases has provided non-cash salaries. Before the state farms were privatized, for example, some of the farms were

paying their workers with bags of flour and rice. Since few families have been able to save money in the post-Soviet period, salary delays make daily survival even more challenging.

High inflation is another problem that has affected the residents of Shauldir. In 1994, several months after food prices were liberalized and the new currency was introduced, the annual inflation rate in Kazakhstan reached an all-time high of 1,160%. The annual inflation rate dropped to 60% in 1995 and 12% in 1997 (World Bank 1998), but the cost of living remained high for the average family since state salaries and pensions did not increase enough to compensate for the new economic situation.

In response to these post-Soviet economic developments, villagers have developed new strategies to make ends meet, or “to see the sun” (*kun koru*) as Kazaks say. Most households have tried to cut expenses by further increasing the production of food for domestic consumption. In particular, households with adequate sources of water have started to produce more vegetables. Some households have also started to bake their own bread, after the subsidized price for bread was liberalized in 1994. In addition to becoming more subsistence-oriented, rural families have sold and slaughtered their private herds of livestock for cash and food. And, finally, many households have tried to find alternative sources of income from bazaar trade, private farming, private herding or handicraft production.

Comments and suggestions for further research

The post-Soviet transition has affected many aspects of social and economic life in rural Kazakhstan. My previous research provides a general description of the economic changes as well as a more detailed examination of gift exchange and social networking (Werner 1997; 1998; 2000). In this concluding section, I want to point out several dimensions of the post-Soviet transition that need to be examined in greater detail. I have intentionally selected topics that have an applied perspective. In other words, I have limited this conclusion to topics that would be of most interest to international and local development agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Social networks and social networking

In addition to household income and household resources (such as livestock and vegetable gardens), household welfare depends on social networks. Strong social networks were important in the Soviet period and continue to be important in the post-Soviet period. In theory, the Soviet system was supposed to provide a relatively equitable means for distributing material goods and services. But, in practice, the state failed to provide an adequate supply of consumer goods or an impartial rendering of services. In response to these shortcomings, Soviet citizens were forced to rely on extensive social networks to gain access to certain goods and services. They frequently used connections to obtain consumer goods, to find housing, to get a job, to advance their careers, to receive quality health care, and to get their children into the university (Werner 1998; Smith 1976).

In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the scope and practice of social networking is changing as the state makes the “transition” from a command-administrative economy to a market oriented economy. On the one hand, social networks are no longer crucial for obtaining certain goods and services. The development of transnational commerce and the privatization of certain sectors have increased the availability of certain consumer goods (such as clothing, electronics and automobiles) and services (such as housing). On the other hand, social networks are still vital for daily survival and social mobility. Due to the economic crisis, many people simply can't afford to pay for the goods and services that are now available. At the same time, certain goods (such as gasoline) and services (such as day care) are becoming less available, while other services (such as higher education and health care) are becoming more expensive. Thus, in the post-Soviet period, social networks may be less important for acquiring consumer goods, yet they remain very important when it comes to employment, career advancement, higher education, health care, and bureaucratic paperwork. Social networks are also invaluable for other informal exchanges, such as cash loans and child care (Werner 1998).

Rural Kazaks build and maintain their household networks through regular exchanges of hospitality, gifts and labor. These networking activities require time, energy and money. This is especially true when it comes to significant life-cycle events, such as weddings and circumcision feasts.

Families are expected to host a feast when their younger sons get circumcised and their older sons get married. At the same time, their relatives and neighbors are expected to attend the event, to provide free labor, and to bring a gift.

In daily conversations, rural Kazaks regularly mention the stress they are experiencing due to these social obligations. In the post-Soviet period, time constraints and financial pressures are making it even more difficult for households to maintain these social obligations. For example, women who are working hard in the bazaar do not have as much time to help their neighbors cook food for a feast. And, households that are no longer receiving income can hardly afford to provide gifts on these occasions.

What is happening to those households that can no longer afford to meet gift exchange obligations? Are their social networks diminishing? If so, how is this affecting daily survival? Or, are they finding alternative ways to meet their social obligations? If so, are patron-client relationships emerging and/or strengthening between affluent and poor households? Similarly, what is happening to those households that do not have time to attend and host as many social events as before? Merchant women, in particular, need to spend long hours at the village bazaar in order to make a profit, and thus have less time to attend social events. Are they finding alternative ways to meet their social obligations and thus maintain their social networks? Previous studies in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia demonstrate that these questions are crucial for understanding the impact of increased poverty and social stratification in the post-Soviet context.¹⁰

Livestock and the privatization of agriculture

In Otyrar *raion*, the privatization of agriculture was not fully completed until 1997. Before that, there were relatively few private farmers, or “peasant farmers” as they are referred to in official discourse. The term “peasant farmer” is used to designate any individual who received parcels of private land from the state during privatization. Not all “peasant farmers” do the farming or herding themselves, though most benefit financially.

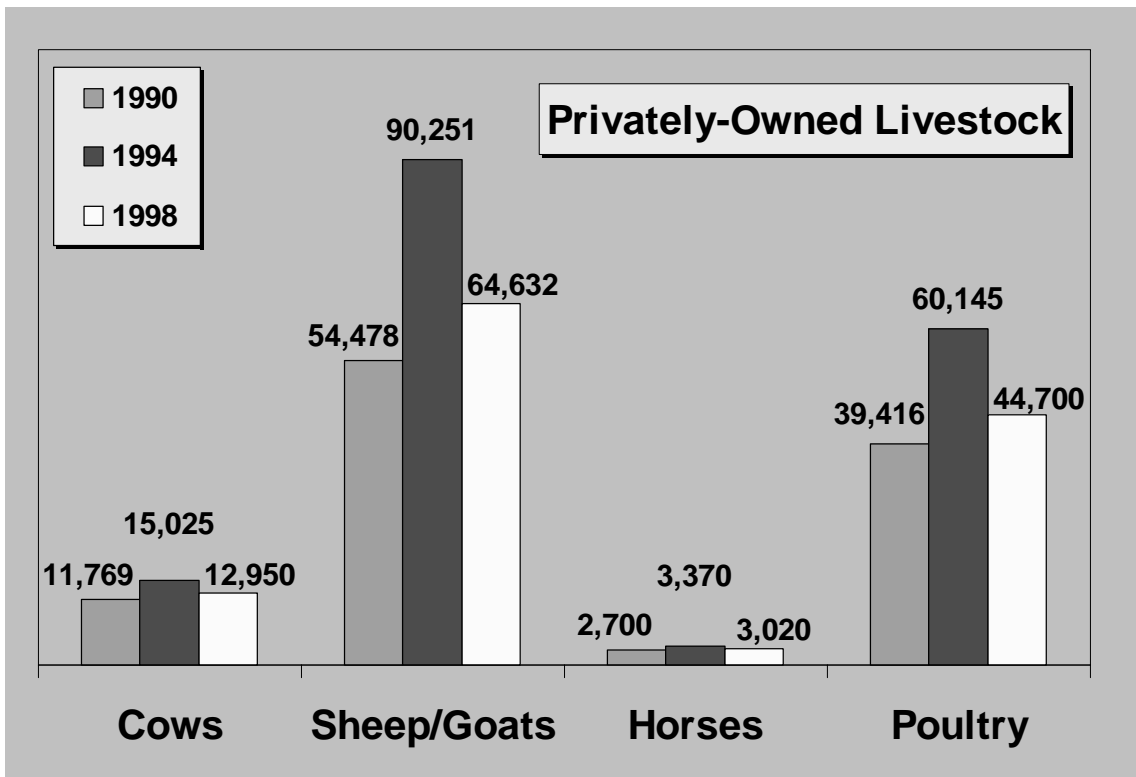
During interviews with dozens of private farmers and state farm workers in 1995, I learned about several obstacles in the privatization process. First, several state farm workers complained that some of the state farm directors were reluctant to grant land to everybody who applied. They suggested that connections and bribes were necessary to acquire private land. Second, some of those who had acquired land mentioned that they had neither adequate water supplies to irrigate the land nor access to farm equipment, such as tractors, to work the land. Third, the private farmers complained that there was no adequate system for acquiring credit. The new private credit were exorbitantly high (beginning at 160%) and the terms were not long enough for the farm cycle. By 1995, the new class of private farmers controlled less than 1% of the *raion* property (11,290 out of 1,731,379 hectares). This included 5,300 hectares of irrigated farm land and 5,900 hectares of pasture land. Collectively, the private farmers owned 5,400 sheep and goats, 2,110 cows, 1,200 horses and 100 camels (Werner 1997).

The process of privatization culminated in 1997, when the nine state and cooperative farms in the region dissolved. At that point, the workers each received a small parcel of land (approximately 1-5 hectares, depending on land quality and household size) and a number of livestock. In addition, they were officially redesignated as “peasant farmers.” Given the difficulties that existed in 1995, further research needs to be conducted on the impact of agricultural privatization: Did the privatization process occur in a fair and impartial manner? Or, did some people with “connections” receive better land and more livestock? Is the local association of private farmers achieving its aim of helping people gain access to equipment, markets and credit? What kinds of training and knowledge do the new private farmers need? Are some of the private farmers forming cooperatives? Are the private farmers producing goods mainly for domestic consumption or for sale? Are the private farmers able to produce enough food and cash to meet basic household needs?

Other questions that arise with the privatization process relate to the declining number of livestock in Otyrar *raion*. As households struggle to make ends meet, many have been forced to sell privately-owned livestock in order to get cash. In 1994 and 1995, it was fairly common for villagers to slaughter livestock for sale in Uzbekistan markets, where the prices for meat were much higher. An adult

cow that cost U.S.\$55 in Shauildir could be slaughtered and the meat could be sold in 1 day for about U.S.\$110 in Tashkent. So, even after the costs for transportation and the bazaar fee (about U.S.\$25) are factored in, the seller could make a decent profit (of U.S.\$30, compared to the average monthly income of about U.S.\$40).

Table 1 – Privately-Owned Livestock, Otyrar Raion, 1990-1998



Between 1990 and 1998, the total number of privately-owned livestock decreased significantly (See Table 1). Initially, there was a rise in the number of privately-owned livestock between 1990 and 1994. This change reflects the initial transfers of livestock from the state sector to the private sector. During the same time, the percent of households with livestock dropped from 87% to 80%. Taken together, these two trends suggest that some households were accumulating wealth while others were losing it. Then, from 1994 to 1998, when one would expect privately-owned livestock to increase even

more with the completion of privatization, the number actually decreased. This reflects the fact that people are selling or consuming their private herds. Interviews with villagers in 1998 confirm that many families are selling off their livestock in order to buy basic necessities. Further research needs to be conducted on this problem: Is livestock still a useful indicator of wealth in the post-Soviet period? Is it wise to trust the official figures? Why or why not? What has happened to the total livestock numbers? Have they been consolidated among the wealthy or have they been slaughtered en masse?

Social stratification and social conflict

Social stratification is an unmistakable consequence of the post-Soviet transition in Kazakstan. Though a few rural Kazaks are buying new luxury goods, such as air conditioners and washing machines, and traveling abroad for recreation and profit, many others are selling their last sheep to pay for basic foods, such as flour and eggs. Not surprisingly, perceptions of the transition process tend to reflect these differences. On the one hand, those who are doing well generally support the market reforms and blame the poor for being lazy, whiny and inflexible. On the other hand, those who are not faring so well resent the pace and extent of reforms and lament the end of an egalitarian ideology. As they search for explanations, many are finding scapegoats in the form of wealthy “biznezmen,” “Mafia” leaders and “corrupt” officials who allegedly have little concern for the welfare of others.¹¹ In Shauildir, these corruption accusations have been fueled by a local reporter who has published several harsh critiques of local leaders in the independent media. Meanwhile, the accused have relied on different private newspapers to defend themselves as the victims of vicious slander.

How does the public view these accusations of corruption? And, what do public responses suggest about the local struggle against corruption? I addressed these questions during the summer of 1998. It is unclear whether or not the accusations, which are intended to improve the situation by creating greater public awareness, have had the desired effect. Local people are clearly divided on this issue. Individual views vary depending on a person’s relationship to the two parties and his/her perception of morality. On the one extreme, there are people who publicly defend the local leaders and openly criticize

the journalist for slandering his political enemies. The people who hold this view generally benefit in some way from the person who is accused of corruption patronage. On the other extreme, there are people who openly support the journalist and unquestioningly believe all of his accusations. These people generally have their own grievances with the local leaders, and thus are willing to risk future ties with these powerful people. In the middle of these two extremes, there are several different positions. Many people quietly side with the journalist whom they describe in heroic terms, but they are afraid to express their views too loudly, lest they offend somebody whose help they may later need. Others believe the journalist's stories, but they disagree with his tactics. Referring to Kazak customary practices, they argue that it is not proper for a young and inexperienced man to challenge the actions of older and respected men, regardless of the circumstances. Further research on this topic should address: 1) the ways in which corruption accusations affect the struggle against corruption, and 2) the positive and negative impacts of corruption accusations on local communities.

Rise of merchant trade

In the post-Soviet period, one of the most conspicuous changes is the development of small-scale trade. The expansion of bazaar trade signifies a sharp break with the Soviet period when the state controlled the production and distribution of all goods. Although small neighborhood and village bazaars did operate in the past, they were largely limited to fresh produce or used consumer goods. Anybody who was involved with the speculative trade of other goods was either profiting at the expense of the state or illegally selling goods from abroad. In contrast, many Kazaks view small-scale trade as the most viable option for survival in the post-Soviet period.

In rural areas, trade is especially viable in villages, such as Shauildir, that already have central marketplaces and have easy access to railways and big cities. As an administrative center, Shauildir already had two semiweekly, state-run bazaars in place, one specializing in livestock and one specializing in food products and household goods. A third privately-owned daily bazaar was opened in 1994 to accommodate the increased volume of trade. The town also benefited from its relative proximity to

several cities: Turkestan, Shymkent, and Tashkent are two, three and six hours away by bus, respectively. Each of these cities can also be reached by train, as the main railway connecting Moscow and Tashkent conveniently stops in a smaller village about 10 miles away.

The lure of the bazaar attracts individuals from various backgrounds. In Shauildir, one could find merchants in three local bazaars, dozens of kiosks, and numerous street corners. Some merchants work daily, while others resort to trade on those occasions when they need some extra cash. Many of the part-time merchants in particular are still full-time employees in other sectors. Some merchants sell home-produced goods, such as fermented horse milk, while others exclusively buy and resell consumer goods. Among the speculative traders, a few travel across national borders to buy goods in Uzbekistan or Iran, while most buy goods in the wholesale markets of nearby cities, such as Turkestan and Shymkent.

Although men can be found selling things in the local bazaars, they are clearly outnumbered by women, especially when it comes to older and elderly merchants. One day, I counted the number of merchants sitting in one of the three village bazaars. On that day, there were 75 merchants working. Fifty-six percent of them were adult women, 16% were girls, 19% were adult men, and 9% were boys. It is important to point out that these figures do not include the merchants who work exclusively at the semiweekly livestock bazaar, which is dominated by men.

In contrast to the livestock bazaar, this daily bazaar contains a wide variety of food products and household goods, the trade of which is dominated by women. Although merchants typically specialize in either food or clothing, most merchants nevertheless sell a variety of goods. On that particular day, 40% of the merchants were selling fruits and vegetables, 32% were selling clothing, 30% were selling rice and pasta, 28% were selling candy and cookies, 20% were selling home-produced goods, and 4% were selling meat.

The gender differences in the marketplace can be explained with reference to both economic and cultural factors. From an economic perspective, there are more women in the bazaars because more women have been laid off in the post-Soviet period (Bauer, Boschmann and Green 1997). In interviews with both male and female merchants, however, an alternative, cultural explanation emerges. According

to some informants, Kazak men just don't handle money as well as women. They are more capricious when it comes to cash, either spending it on alcohol or loaning it to undeserving friends. In their opinion, this is why women usually manage the household income and why women belong in the marketplace.

The merchant women in Shauldir are bringing in significant amounts of income, which they generally contribute to the household pool. All of the women I spoke to started their businesses because their household needed more money for basic survival. Some households rely exclusively on the income derived from small-scale trade, while others receive income from multiple sources. Regardless, the income from small-scale trade represents a significant portion of household income, especially at a time when state salaries and state pensions are delayed for months. The majority of merchant women, however, rely on other household members to help them with their work. Their husbands and children provide assistance with the purchasing, transport and selling of goods. Thus, although the women who sit daily in the bazaar do the most time-consuming aspect of the job, the business itself is viewed within the family as a collaborative venture.

Further research on the marketplace should address the following questions: What percent of bazaar merchants are successful? Why are they successful? In other words, what factors affect the success of local merchants (business knowledge, social networks, family cooperation, trade goods, etc.)? How do social obligations and traditional customs (that require time and stress generosity) affect their business practices?

Status of women

The transition process has affected women's lives in particular ways. First, a significant number of women have lost their jobs in the state sector. Second, the post-Soviet transition has brought serious cutbacks to the heavily subsidized system of nurseries. From 1989 to 1994, the total enrollment in Kazakhstan's nurseries declined from 52% to 28% of preschool children (Klugman et al. 1997). The employability of women is strongly influenced by the existence of child care options. As nurseries become less available and more expensive in the post-Soviet period, working women have to become

more dependent on social networks for child care and/or find jobs, such as trading, where they can bring their children to the workplace.

As mentioned above, women are very active in the marketplace, where they tend to dominate the trade of clothing and produce. On the one hand, this work has the potential to increase a woman's power within the household, especially if the income derived from this work is acknowledged as her income. On the other hand, women's involvement in small-scale trade sometimes comes with social costs. As women spend long hours outside of the home, this trade can have negative effects on children who may receive less supervision and on marital relations, which may become strained. Further research on merchant women should address the following questions: How does women's participation in the marketplace affects their individual status within the family and within society? How does women's participation in the marketplace affect family relations and gender roles?

Another issue that is important regarding the status of women is the practice of bride kidnapping. In the rural regions of southern Kazakhstan, young couples meet and marry in several different ways. In Kazak terms, most marriages fall into one of two categories: arranged marriages (*quda tusu*) or kidnap marriages (*alyq qashu*). For each category, however, the actual practices may vary greatly from the implied meaning. In the case of arranged marriages, the union might actually be initiated by the young couple, yet formally arranged by the parents after they give their consent. In the case of kidnap marriages, the bride may be literally kidnapped against her will, or she may be a co-conspirator in her kidnapping. Those who are kidnapped against their will have a choice between marrying somebody they don't know or facing the social stigma of allowing themselves to be kidnapped (with the implication of possible rape). Meanwhile, those brides who conspire in their kidnapping choose to do so for a variety of reasons: she and her boyfriend might want to speed up the marriage process, they may want to marry against their parents' wishes, or they may want to stifle gossip about an unintended pregnancy (Werner 1998).

Numerous questions remain when it comes to bride kidnapping. What are the historical roots of bride kidnapping? Why was the Soviet state unsuccessful in eradicating this practice or "tradition"? How

can the persistence of this practice be reconciled with other Soviet policies (i.e. education and employment) that effectively increased women's status in society? Is bride kidnapping on the rise in the post-Soviet period? If so, why? Is this a way to empower young men during a time in which their options and futures are constrained? Also, given the fact that kidnapping is illegal, further research on this topic should consider the extent to which legal channels are ever pursued by the girl and her parents. Finally, as Amsler and Kleinbach (1999) have pointed out in their research on bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, it is important to find out how many kidnappings are consensual, and to explore how men and women differ in their views of bride kidnapping and the concept of consent.

Status of the aged and elderly

Kazak "tradition" dictates that adult children should care for their aged parents, yet anthropological research in other societies suggests that these customs do not always hold up in practice. In the Soviet context, the elderly were a great asset in rural Kazak households: not only did they receive substantial pensions from the state, but they had free time to supervise young children.

What problems do the elderly face in the post-Soviet period? First, the value of their pensions has not kept up with the increased cost of living. To make up for this, many elderly are working for cash income. For example, I met an 80-year old widow who bakes dozens of flat breads every day for cash and flour. And, I met another 68-year-old woman who sells corn water and hard cheese at the daily bazaar. Second, as health care becomes more expensive, many rural families cannot afford the hospital fees and drugs that their elderly relatives need. Further research needs to be done on the status of the elderly in rural Kazakhstan. Are values towards the elderly changing as the economic situation becomes more dreary? If so, is the custom of caring for the elderly changing as well?

Education and the status of youth

As employment opportunities decrease and higher education becomes more expensive, there is a need to study the impact of the post-Soviet transition on rural Kazak youth. In 1990, about 75% of the

adult population in Otyrar raion had completed secondary schools (generally, 10-11 years of schooling) and 12% had completed higher education (Otyrar raion statistics, 1990). How will the transition affect these education levels? For example, as teacher salaries are devalued and teachers leave the profession, what happens to the quality of education? And, what employment opportunities exist for young high school and college graduates? If their future employment opportunities are limited to private farming and/or market trade, how will this affect graduation levels, in secondary school and in higher education? Should we expect to see a decline in overall education levels? Will parents continue to value education or will they encourage their children to stay home to help with farming or trading?

Rural-urban migration

Rural-urban migration is an economic strategy for many families in Shauildir. Though Kazaks generally have a strong nostalgia for their birthplace (*tugan zher*), many believe that the opportunities in the village are limited in the post-Soviet period. In addition, some migrants point out that the living conditions in Shauildir and the other villages are too harsh due to the poor water supply and poor environmental conditions. Throughout the village, numerous homes have “for sale” signs up. It is unclear just how many residents have moved, either temporarily or permanently, as many urban migrants are still “officially” living in the village. Further research on rural-urban migration should consider the following questions: Are the migrants satisfied with their moves? What factors influence whether or not a family moves (education, social connections and family in city, clan affiliations, job opportunities, etc.)? What opportunities exist for migrants? Are migrants economically successful compared to those who stay behind? What kind of relations do urban migrants maintain with their native villages? Do they send remittances to their relatives in the village? Do they exchange gifts with their relatives in the village? Do they leave children behind in the village with relatives?

Health and nutrition

Finally, further research needs to be conducted on the health and dietary conditions of rural Kazaks. Such research should consider the impact of reduced subsidies in the health sector, the impact of social stratification, the impact of the traditional meat and carbohydrate-intensive diet, and the impact of water-related problems. According to local doctors, anemia (especially among women), tuberculosis, high blood pressure are all prevalent in Otyrar *raion*. Also, research on the Kazak diet should consider the connections between “guesting” and diet. And, finally, any study of Kazak health should take into account the role of alcohol. Male Kazaks, in particular, consume large amounts of alcohol at social functions, largely due to the practice of toast-giving.

In conclusion, the post-Soviet transition has affected almost every aspect of daily life in rural Kazakstan. The cost of living has increased, job opportunities have decreased, and daily conditions have continued to be difficult. This report provides an overview of the conditions in rural Kazakstan and then suggests a number of areas for further research, especially research that would have practical applications for people living in rural Kazakstan.

Bibliography

- Amsler, Sarah and Russel Kleinbach. 1999. "Bride Kidnapping in the Kyrgyz Republic." Online. Available: http://faculty.philau.edu/kleinbachr/bride_kidnapping.htm Access date: May 30, 2000.
- Baisheva, S. (ed.). 1991. *Shezire: Qazaqtyn rutaipalyq qyrulysy*. (Genealogy: The Construction of Kazak Lineages.) Almaty: Rauan Publishers.
- Bauer, Armin, Nina Boschmann and David Green. 1997. *Women and Gender Relations in Kazakhstan*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Bauer, Armin, David Green and Kathleen Kuehnast. 1998. *Women and Gender Relations: The Kyrgyz Republic in Transition*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Falkingham, Jane, Jeni Klugman, Sheila Marnie, and John Micklewright. (eds.) 1997. *Household Welfare in Central Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Fierman, William. (ed.). 1991. *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Forsythe, Rosemarie. 1996. *The Politics of Oil in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Prospects for Oil Exploitation and Export in the Caspian Basin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Glantz, Michael. (ed.). 1999. *Creeping Environmental Problems and Sustainable Development in the Aral Sea Basin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grousset, Rene. 1970. *The Empires of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Haghighyehi, Mehrdad. 1994. *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Harris, Collette. 1998. "Coping with Daily Life in Post-Soviet Tajikistan: The Gharmi Villages of Khatlon Province" *Central Asian Survey* 17(4): 655-671.
- Humphrey, Caroline and David Sneath. 1998. *The End of Nomadism? : Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ismail, Suraiya and Hereward Hill. 1997. "Nutritional Status in the Kzyl-Orda Area of Kazakhstan" In *Household Welfare in Central Asia*. Jane Falkingham et al., (eds.). Pp. 141-160. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1998. "Rural Livelihoods and Social Networks in Uzbekistan: Perspectives from Andijan" *Central Asian Survey* 17(4): 561-578.
- Kaser, Michael. 1997. *The Economies of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Khazanov, Anatoly. 1995. *After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- Klugman, Jeni, George Schieber, Timothy Heleniak, and Vivian Hon. 1996. *A Survey of Health Reform in Central Asia*. Washington: World Bank.
- Klugman, Jeni and Kinnon Scott. 1997. "Measuring Labor Market Status in Kazakhstan" In *Household Welfare in Central Asia*. Jane Falkingham et al., (eds.). Pp. 118-140. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Lubin, Nancy. 1984. *Labour and Nationality in Soviet Central Asia*. London: Macmillan.
- Luong-Jones, Pauline and Erika Weinthal. 1999. "The NGO paradox: democratic goals and non-democratic outcomes in Kazakhstan" *Europe-Asia Studies* 51(7): 1267-84.
- Olcott, Martha. 1987. *The Kazakhs*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press.
- Otyrar Regional Statistics. 1994. "1993 zhylyghy audan khalyq sharuashylyghynyn negisgi korsetkishteri" (Basic Indicators for the Region's Private Economies, 1993).
Qyzylqum (regional newspaper). May 17, 1990.
- Ro'i, Yaacov. (ed.). 1995. *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*. London: Frank Cass.
- Ruffin, M. Holt and Daniel Waugh. (eds.). 1999. *Civil Society in Central Asia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Rumer, Boris. 1989. *Soviet Central Asia: "A Tragic Experiment"*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Rumer, Boris and Stanislav Zhukov. (eds.). 1998. *Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Rywkin, Michael. 1982. *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.
- Sadibekov, Zaiyr. 1994. *Qazaq Shezhiresi*. (Kazak Genealogy). Tashkent: Uzbekiston Publishers.
- Smith, Hedrick. 1976. *The Russians*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Tatimov, Maqash. 1993. *Qazaq Alemi* (The Population of the Kazaks.) Almaty: Qazaqstan-Atamura Publishers.
- Werner, Cynthia. 1997. "Household Networks, Ritual Exchange and Economic Change in Rural Kazakstan." Ph.D. Dissertation. Indiana University.
- Werner, Cynthia. 1998. "Household Networks and the Security of Mutual Indebtedness in Rural Kazakstan." *Central Asian Survey* 17(4): 597-612.
- Werner, Cynthia. 2000. "Gifts, Bribes and Development in Post-Soviet Kazakstan." *Human Organization* 59(1): 11-22.
- World Bank. 1998. *Kazakhstan: Country Overview*. January 1998 [last update]. Online. The World Bank. Available: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/offrep/eca/kazcb.htm>. Access date: March 14, 1999.

ENDNOTES

¹ Otyrar region celebrated its 60-year anniversary in 1990. This celebration also marked the 55th anniversary of its present borders. In honor of the event, the local government published a special edition of the local newspaper and a small pamphlet outlining the official history of the region (*Qyzylqum* 1990).

² In Western academic settings, people frequently ask me whether the privatization of agriculture will bring about a return to a more nomadic form of pastoralism in Kazakhstan, similar to what is happening in Mongolia (Humphrey and Sneath 1999). For the minority of rural Kazaks who have maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle as state farm shepherds, this is a possible scenario. But, for most rural Kazaks, I believe that this is an unlikely scenario, as they have become quite accustomed to the sedentary lifestyle. Although elements from the nomadic lifestyle, such as the symbol of the yurt's top (*shanghyraq*), are valued as national symbols, nomadism itself is not romanticized as a preferred way of life.

³ In Shauildir, certain patrilineages of the Qonghyrat tribe are especially prominent, for both men and women. This includes the *Manghytai*, *Zhetimder*, *Tinei*, *Sanghyl* and *Bozhban* patrilineages (Werner 1997).

⁴ Throughout the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of publication on Kazak tribal genealogies. The various genealogies do provide conflicting information when it comes to the number of Kazak clans and the genealogical relationships between the clans and lineages.

⁵ There are few studies on the nutritional status of people living in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. One notable exception is Ismail and Hill's study (1997) in Kzyl-Orda oblast. Among other things, this study points out the high percentage of women (36.2%) and children (47.6%) who have anemia. Possible explanations include low levels of meat consumption, high levels of tea consumption, the use of the IUD, and the impact of pregnancy and breastfeeding.

⁶ This information is based on household survey data collected in 1994. While the survey did not directly address nutrition, the survey did include questions on household income, food expenditures, household livestock and poultry, and household vegetable production. Further, interviews with villagers reveal that they themselves use dietary concepts to distinguish affluent and non-affluent households. For example, one informant suggested that I interview a certain "poor family that only eats bread with tea and meatless pilaf."

⁷ Hospitality is one of the central themes of Kazak (and Central Asian) culture. Guests are always treated with great respect and provided with large quantities of food. The consumption of food at any social event far exceeds the consumption of food for a typical meal. For this reason, those who frequently "go guesting" (*qonaqqa baru*) inevitably consume more food than others. Guesting frequencies between households generally correlate with wealth and status: the members of affluent and/or powerful households are invited to more social events. Within households, variations in guesting frequencies relate to several factors, including age, gender and social status within the household. For example, Kazak couples often take their youngest or favorite child with them to social events, while leaving the others in the care of an older sibling or a daughter-in-law (Werner 1997).

⁸ These figures for unemployed adults are based on regional demographic data, not official unemployment registers. The number factors in all unemployed adults, male and female, over the age of 16, whether or not they are seeking employment and whether or not they are healthy enough to work. It is likely that certain groups within this population, such as young mothers and elderly persons, are not actually in search of employment.

The official unemployment rate, on the other hand, is unreliable because it only includes people who register themselves as unemployed (Klugman and Scott 1997). The official rate is also based on a fairly narrow definition of unemployment which excludes significant groups of people, such as factory workers who were forced to take unpaid leaves and displaced state farm workers who were simply redefined as "peasant farmers" after farm privatization. The official unemployment rate for Kazakhstan was 2% in 1997. According to the World Bank, the unemployment rate would probably be closer to 12% if involuntary leaves and part-time furloughs were included (World Bank 1998). This estimate still excludes displaced state farm workers who no longer receive regular salaries and may or may not be cultivating new private parcels of land.

⁹ From 1992-1994, the percent of employed male adults in Shauldir decreased from 80.9% to 72.2%, and the percent of employed female adults decreased from 77.2% to 63%.

¹⁰ Personal communication with Nora Dudwick and Kathleen Kuehnast, analysts at the World Bank. April 9, 2000.

¹¹ These groups are neither mutually exclusive, nor perceived to be such.