

Dispossession and Accumulation in an Ethnic Minority Border Region:
The Kazakh Project in Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang, China

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Abstract

This study examines Altay Prefecture, one of China's border regions inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, as a case to elucidate how the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and accumulation through the management of ethnicity and culture in an ethnic minority region. Within the framework of a case study, I employ document analysis and ethnographic fieldwork methods to collect data, which is then analyzed using the critical policy framework. The research results reveal an intensive, specific set of programs that aim to integrate Kazakh people and land into the Chinese economy and rapidly restructure Kazakh livelihoods, justified by the Ecological Civilization and the Anti-Poverty War in Xi's era. Under the guise of Ecological Civilization, the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and accumulation in Altay Prefecture by dispossessing Kazakh land and dismantling Kazakh nomadism. In the name of the Anti-Poverty War, the Chinese state has developed husbandry, agriculture, and ethnic tourism, which produce value by commodifying, exploiting, and eliminating Kazakh identity and culture simultaneously. This study contributes to our understanding of how dispossession and capital accumulation operate in one of China's ethnic minority regions, and the results have implications for China's policy adoptions at a local level and for geopolitics in Central Asia.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Yao Qu. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta, Research Ethics Board. The project name is “Kazakh Mobility, Power, and Chinese Nation-Building: The Route Toward a Contemporary China in Altay Prefecture,” with the approval number Pro00119879, granted on May 10, 2022.

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1.0 Introduction: Nomadic Muslims on China's Northwestern Border

In the fall of 2020, when I went back to my hometown, Altay City, I hung out with one of my friends, Borjan (pseudonym), an indigenous Kazakh. He said, “look at our hometown! It has changed so much!” During a lunch with Borjan, he told me the stories of his kin in nomad sedentarization locations, rural villages, and the city. I still remember the sorrow and helplessness he had when we were chatting. Borjan told me his nomadic kin could not make a living anymore after they were sedentarized by the Chinese authorities. “Some of them went back to Kazakhstan, others sold all the livestock and moved here (to Altay City) to make a living,” Borjan said. I asked how they could make a living here, to which Borjan answered, “who knows?” Indeed, even Borjan, a bilingual (Kazakh and Mandarin) Kazakh with a bachelor’s degree was struggling to find a job, not to mention rural Kazakhs who have neither degrees nor certificates and cannot speak Mandarin at all. Borjan’s stories echoed a very obvious phenomenon in Altay City: the massive influx of rural Kazakhs along with the dramatic growth of securitization. When I visited Lasti Village, a nearby Kazakh village I used to hang out in with my friends, I was shocked by the greenhouses built upon the former Kazakh pastures and the bulldozed and empty houses nearby. The local political economy in Altay at all levels (urban, rural, and pastoral) has been dramatically changed within just a few years, and this study is an attempt to answer why and how the change has happened.

This study attempts to answer how Chinese authorities have in the Xi Jinping era achieved dispossession and accumulation in Altay Prefecture in a relatively short period of time (between 2009 and 2022) through a specific set of policies and programs that, justified by the ideologies of Ecological Civilization and the Anti-Poverty War, have dismantled and restructured Kazakh people’s lands and livelihoods. Altay Prefecture, the only region in Xinjiang that borders both Russia and Kazakhstan, has geopolitical importance in China’s One Belt One Road Initiative.

The recent intensive restructuring of Kazakh livelihoods in Altay Prefecture began in 2009, when the local authorities implemented the High-Standard Sedentarization Project in the region. Under a case study framework, I use document analysis and ethnographic methods to study Kazakhs' situation in Altay Prefecture between 2009 and 2022. The specific research methods are further elaborated in chapter three.

This study adopts a theoretical framework of how dispossession and accumulation are achieved through land grabbing, the racialization and exploitation of Kazakh identity, the commodification and elimination of Kazakh culture, and the restructuring of the relationship between productive and social reproductive activities in relation to Kazakh land. Specifically, in terms of land dispossession, I adopt Marx's primitive accumulation through state power and green grabbing coined by Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones (2012) to analyze how the Chinese authorities dispossess Kazakh land in the name of ecological protection. I then draw on insights from Harvey's accumulation by dispossession to examine how Kazakh land dispossession continues to happen in the Chinese neoliberal context for capital accumulation during the development of three industries: husbandry, agriculture, and tourism. In order to account Kazakh-Han hierarchy and segregation in the industries, I adopt the concept of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000; Leong, 2013; Melamed, 2015) to analyze how Kazakh identity is racialized and exploited in the Chinese economy at both local and national levels. To further examine the remake of Kazakh culture in the industries, I review the concepts of cultural commodification, alienation, and genocide to analyze how Kazakh culture has been managed in different industries for accumulation.

This study has several potential contributions. First, it could contribute to the theoretical discussions on how capital accumulates through the management of ethnicity and culture by presenting the Kazakh case in China. Second, it can add to the understanding of how Beijing's policies are adopted in an ethnic minority region (Altay Prefecture) on the border. Third, it can

provide some clarification on the complex geopolitics of Central Asia by adding a Kazakh perspective on China's northwestern border. In order to better contextualize this study and clarify both the geopolitical importance and academic values of research on Kazakhs in Xinjiang, below I provide the geopolitical, social, economic, cultural, and political background of Kazakhs and Altay Prefecture in Xinjiang.

1.1 Kazakh Resistance in Xinjiang

As one of the major nomadic Muslim groups in Central Asia, ethnic Kazakhs widely distribute from East Asia to West Asia. While the majority of Kazakhs live in Kazakhstan, some East Asian and Central Asian countries also have significant Kazakh populations.¹ For example, more than 1.5 million Kazakhs reside in China,² 0.8 million in Uzbekistan,³ and thousands in Mongolia, Turkey, and Iran. As a significant nomadic Muslim population that connects China and Mongolia to the Middle East, Kazakhs have been largely overlooked by area scholars specialized in China or Islam. In this study, I examine Kazakhs in Altay Prefecture, a Kazakh homeland in northern Xinjiang, to enrich our understanding of the situations nomadic Muslims are facing in China.

This study mainly focuses on Kazakhs in Altay Prefecture, the northernmost region in Xinjiang that borders Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. Altay Prefecture has one city (Altay City) and six counties (Altay City, Qinggil County, Burultogay County, Jeminay County, Kaba County, Koktoghay County, Burqin County). Except for in Altay City and Burultogay County, the Kazakhs are the significant majority in these counties.

1 According to the latest population census in Kazakhstan, ethnic Kazakhs had a population of 13.5 million people, which composes 68.5 percent of the total population in the country. See <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYmJiNjU5NzItNWYyZi00Mjc2LTg5OWQtN2I2Y2QxY2I0NzEzIiwidCI6ImRlNzAxMmMyLTI0M2MtNDFjMi04NjRmLWE5YmEyMGY0YzUxOSIsImMiOjI9&pageName=ReportSection7e0131f57a0773bd8643>.

2 According to the latest statistics yearbook of China in 2021. See <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2021/index.htm>.

3 See <https://web.archive.org/web/20180822145750/https://www.stat.uz/en/press-center/news-committee/435-analiticheskie-materialy-en1/2075-demographic-situation-in-the-republic-of-uzbekistan>.

1.1.1 Build a Kazakh State: Kazakh Military Resistance Against the Chinese Rules

As a nomadic Turkic-Muslim group that is recognized as one of the 55 ethnic minorities in China, Kazakhs are very foreign to Han Chinese, the ethnic majority who are politically, culturally, and economically dominant in China in terms of culture, language, religion, and even physical features. Since 1931, Kazakhs in Xinjiang have been resisting Chinese rules through military means, exodus, and intra-ethnic marriage. In 1931, some Kazakh nomads joined a revolt against the Republic of China (ROC) organized by Khoja Niyaz, an ethnic Uyghur who was one of the founders of the First East Turkestan Republic in 1933, in Kumul, a prefecture in southeast Xinjiang (Wang, 2012). Between 1933 and 1939, in order to escape from the brutal oppression by Sheng Shicai—a Chinese warlord who ruled Xinjiang at the time—11,680 Kazakhs migrated from Xinjiang to Gansu Province.

Since 1941, Kazakhs in Altay Prefecture had organized a military rebellion against Sheng's rule. The leader of the Kazakh rebellion, Ospan Batyr, an ethnic Kazakh from Koktoghay, founded the Altay National Kazakh Revival Committee in 1943, which pursued Kazakh self-governance and the expulsion of both Han Chinese armies and residents (Wang, 2012). In 1944, Ospan controlled Qinggil, Burultogay, and Koktoghay, and then he worked with Dalalkan and controlled the majority of Altay Prefecture except for Burqin. In October 1944, with the support of the Soviet Union and Mongolia, the Altay Mountain National Revolution Government was founded in Qinggil, with Ospan as president. In 1945, the army of the Second East Turkestan Republic (SETR), a short-lived state backed by the Soviet Union in 1944, entered the Altay region and later absorbed the Kazakh forces (Wang, 2012). In 1949, the SETR collapsed, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control over the Altay region. In the next year, Ospan was executed, and his remaining forces were eliminated by the CCP.

1.1.2 Escape from Chinese Oppression: Kazakh Exodus since the 1960s

After the Kazakh military forces were eradicated by the CCP in 1950, Kazakhs in Xinjiang have been using two non-violent ways to resist the Chinese rules: exodus and intra-ethnic marriage. Since the 1960s, Kazakhs in northern Xinjiang have been emigrating to the Soviet Union/Kazakhstan due to state oppression, ethnic tensions, famine, and land policies. In 1962, a massive exodus took place in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, a sub-provincial prefecture in northern Xinjiang that includes Altay Prefecture, Tarbaghatay Prefecture, and cities/counties in northwest Xinjiang (e.g., Ghulja and Qorghas). In the exodus, more than 67,000 indigenous people fled to the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan, most of them ethnic Kazakhs (Mao, 2018). The main reasons for the Kazakh exodus were the great famine caused by the Great Leap Campaign, the influx of Han Chinese settlers, and the split of Sino–Soviet relations (Mao, 2018).

After the Economic Reform in 1978, the situation of Kazakh nomads in northern Xinjiang began deteriorating, which pushed more Kazakhs to seek greener grass in Kazakhstan (Cerny, 2010). In the 1980s, Chinese authorities enacted the “grassland usage permission” system, which assigned each Kazakh household a pasture to feed their livestock. However, the system was defrauded and sluggish, which caused significant problems for Kazakh nomads who tried to raise more livestock to cope with the surge in living costs. Moreover, in the historical view implemented by the CCP, nomadism has been portrayed as “backward,” and nomads need help to be “civilized” in a relatively sedentary lifestyle (Cerny, 2010). Such racist attitudes regarding nomadism have been making Kazakhs and other nomadic ethnic groups (e.g., Tibetans and Mongols) suffer on a daily basis.

Under the restrictions of the system, the degradation of grassland, and racism surrounding nomadism, the livelihood and cultural identity of Kazakh nomads have been severely threatened. Hence, between the 1990s and 2010s, attracted by the free health care and education and plentiful grassland, many Kazakh nomads migrated to Kazakhstan under the Oralman (returnee)

program (Cerny, 2010). Nevertheless, the returned Kazakhs in Kazakhstan also face similar hardships they once experienced in Xinjiang. The privatization of state-owned enterprises eliminated collective practices and government subsidies for nomads in Kazakhstan who are struggling with the surging costs of animal feed (Kerven, 2003). Furthermore, some returned Kazakhs face a shortage of services and thus become second-class citizens or stateless people in Kazakhstan (Cerny, 2010).

Since 2017, the latest wave of Kazakh exodus has taken place out of northern Xinjiang as a response to the brutal crackdown under Chen Quanguo's rule. Before 2016, though Kazakh nomads had been facing restrictive policies that threaten their nomadic lifestyle, the Kazakh language, Islamic practices, and Kazakh cultural education had been largely preserved. However, since Chen Quanguo became the party secretary of Xinjiang in August 2016,⁴ he launched a thought-transformation campaign against Turkic Muslims in the region. Since 2017, the Xinjiang governments have been building large-scale internment camps across the region (including Altay Prefecture) to detain Turkic Muslims who are considered to practice "religious extremism." In the camps, the detainees are required to accept patriotic education and learn the Chinese national language (Mandarin) (Zenz, 2019). At the same time, in Altay Prefecture, all Kazakh elementary schools and mosques are permanently closed, and all Kazakh children must read in Chinese language schools. If the previous restrictive policies mainly targeted Kazakh nomadism, the crackdown under Chen Quanguo's rule aims to totally eliminate the Kazakh language and religious identity. Hence, in order to escape cultural genocide, many Kazakhs—in particular those who have citizenship and/or family ties in Kazakhstan—have emigrated to Kazakhstan since 2017.

4 See <http://www.rmzxb.com.cn/c/2016-08-30/1006842.shtml>.

1.1.3 Guard Kazakh Identity: Oppose the Inter-Ethnic Marriage with Han Settlers

The Kazakh exodus since the 1960s can be seen as a form of resistance against the Chinese rules and oppression in the Kazakh homeland. Since Ospan and his subordinates were executed in 1950, Kazakhs in northern Xinjiang can hardly challenge Chinese rule through a military organization. Hence, as border inhabitants, many Kazakhs have chosen to permanently leave Xinjiang. Where some Kazakhs left their homelands in Xinjiang permanently, the majority remain because more and more have realized the risks and hardships of living in Kazakhstan. When I was in elementary school in the 2000s, many Kazakhs around me spoke of Kazakhstan as a promising land with better health care, education, and economy than Altay. However, after the 2010s when many fled Kazakhs shared information of their hardships in Kazakhstan with their relatives in Altay Prefecture, Kazakhs increasingly realized that Kazakhstan was not as good as they once thought. In 2020, I met several Kazakhs at an insurance company in Altay City who emigrated to Kazakhstan and gave up their Chinese citizenship. The manager explained that their insurance was not recognized by the company because of their citizenship, information which made them desperate. Some local Kazakhs in Altay City told me that Kazakhs who decided to emigrate to Kazakhstan could no longer access social insurance and health care in China, and they could hardly access such services in Kazakhstan because of the shortage. Hence, many Kazakhs who once considered leaving chose to stay in Altay Prefecture instead.

Aside from the Kazakh exodus, the Kazakhs who remained have been challenging the Chinese rules by preserving their language and cultural identity. According to a study on inter-ethnic marriages in China conducted by Xinjiang Social Sciences Faculty Ethnic Research Institute in 2004, among all 55 ethnic minorities in China, ethnic Kazakhs had the lowest inter-ethnic marriage rate with Han Chinese, only 0.21 percent (Li, 2004). Ethnic Dongxiang, a Mongolic Muslim group living in Gansu Province, and Uyghurs had the second and third lowest rates, respectively (0.23 and 0.62 percent). In comparison, the inter-ethnic marriage rate between Manchurians and Han Chinese was 41.94 percent (Li, 2004). The very low inter-ethnic marriage

rate between Kazakhs and Han Chinese reflects a low social trust among the groups, which also corroborates my daily experience. Before 2017, some Kazakhs in Altay City openly claimed that their family banned inter-ethnic marriage between Kazakhs and Han Chinese. Kazakhs tend to prioritize intra-ethnic marriage—occasionally finding marriage with other Turkic Muslims (e.g., Uyghurs and Uzbeks), Chinese Muslims (Huis), and Mongols acceptable—but inter-ethnic marriage with Han Chinese was unacceptable in most cases.

As a nomadic Turkic-Muslim group, Kazakhs have been resisting the Chinese rules through military means, exodus, and intra-ethnic marriage. In order to handle the Kazakh resistance along with the Uyghurs and better integrate their homelands into the Chinese state, Chinese authorities have been restructuring the political economy in Xinjiang since the 1950s.

1.2 The Colonial Restructuring of Xinjiang by the Chinese State

Since the establishment of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region upon the homelands of Turkic Muslim groups (e.g., Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Kirghiz) in 1955, Chinese authorities have been struggling to integrate the region into the Chinese state politically, economically, and culturally. Since 1949, Chinese authorities have been gradually building up their power in Xinjiang from political consolidation and moderate economic policies in Mao's era to economic integration in Deng's era and the radical restructuring of the region politically, economically, and culturally in Xi's era.

Before the region became part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the region had two short-lived Turkic-Islamic republics: the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan (1933–1934) and the East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949). The Republics fought against Guomindang and Sheng Shicai and sought self-determination and sovereignty for Turkic Muslims (in particular Uyghurs) in the region. In northern Xinjiang, some Kazakhs organized militant groups in Altay

Prefecture to rebel against Sheng Shicai in 1941, and two years later they founded the Altay National Kazakh Revival Committee to pursue Kazakh self-governance (Wang, 2012). Hence, before the establishment of the PRC, Turkic Muslim groups (in particular Uyghurs and Kazakhs) had sought self-determination and rebelled against the Chinese rules in the region.

1.2.1 The Mao Era: Power Consolidation and Political Integration

When the PRC took over Xinjiang in 1949, more than 91 percent of the population was Muslim, and most were of Turkic ethnic groups (Yuan, 1990). In the Mao era, since Xinjiang lacked a real, legitimate base for the Chinese rules and had been plagued with anti-Han sentiments before 1949, the CCP patiently built up its rule in Xinjiang by relocating Han Chinese into the region while adopting relatively moderate policies. Due to the immigration projects conducted by Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) and the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward, a massive influx of Han Chinese occurred between 1954 and 1962, which significantly changed the ethnic distribution in the region (Yuan, 1990). After 1964, Han Chinese became the second largest ethnic group in Xinjiang, and their share in the region's total population has since been climbing. According to the Seventh Population Census in 2020, the Han Chinese represent 42 percent of the total population in the region.⁵

Along with the large number of Han immigrants in Xinjiang, the CCP gradually consolidated its power in the region through the Han leadership of Wang Zhen and Wang Enmao (McMillen, 1984). Though Xinjiang was granted regional autonomy for Uyghurs and other indigenous groups in 1955, de facto power has been in the hands of Han Chinese leaders from the CCP and People's Liberation Army (PLA). Before 1957, the socioeconomic development in Xinjiang was primarily conducted by the XPCC, a paramilitary organization formed by demobilized PLA soldiers, former Kuomintang soldiers, and resettled Han workers. From 1957 to 1961, the

⁵ See <http://tjj.xinjiang.gov.cn/tjj/rkjyug/202203/a78c402be9d44ca58ff431751698d3ca.shtml>.

Chinese authorities shifted their policies in Xinjiang to a more radical Maoist approach due to the deterioration of Sino–Soviet relations (McMillen, 1984). During the Anti-Local Nationalist campaign and the Great Leap Forward, many indigenous elites were purged, and communes were built for more radical politico-economic transformations. Moreover, the Chinese authorities adopted more assimilationist nationality policies and attacked religions (in particular, Islam) (McMillen, 1984).

The radical restructuring of the local political economy led to the massive exodus of Kazakhs from the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture to the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan (Mao, 2018). The exodus forced Wang Enmao, the Communist party secretary of Xinjiang at the time, to soften policies to restore law and order in the region. During the early stage of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1971, the Chinese authorities suspended the movement in Xinjiang because they were afraid of the potential secessionist movement and Soviet meddling (McMillen, 1984). In 1969, Wang was removed from the top position, and Xinjiang soon fell into a decade-long power struggle due to the two-line struggle campaign. Nevertheless, indigenous populations in Xinjiang were not very enthusiastic to follow radical policy initiatives, which reflected a low degree of political integration in the region at the time (McMillen, 1984).

1.2.2 The Deng Era: Economic Integration and Uyghur-Han Conflicts

After the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping, China’s chairman at the time, shifted the Chinese economy from a socialist-planned economy to a market-oriented one during the Economic Reform, which further impacted Chinese economic policies in Xinjiang. In 1999, Jiang Zemin, the president of China at the time, launched the strategy for large-scale development of western China, which required the relatively underdeveloped 12 provinces/regions in western China to transform their resource advantages into economic ones.⁶ The strategy demanded Xinjiang to

⁶ See http://cn.chinagate.cn/economics/xbkf/2009-12/02/content_18996200.htm.

develop hydraulic, energy, and transportation projects; utilize economic structures; focus on the northern regions first; protect ecology; develop education and technology; and build economic ties with Central Asia, West Asia, and eastern Europe.⁷ One of the biggest projects in the strategy was the West–East Gas Pipeline, which transports gas in Tarim Basin in Xinjiang to Shanghai, one of the most prosperous cities in China.⁸

The rapid development of Xinjiang’s economy since the Economic Reform intensifies ethnic discontent (in particular Uyghur discontent) and Han–Uyghur conflicts because of economic inequality and exploitation (Finley, 2013; Bovingdon, 2002). The strategy prioritized Han regions in northeast Xinjiang while ignoring the Uyghur regions in the southwest, which created a large economic gap between the groups (Pannell & Schmidt, 2006). Moreover, Uyghur identity, culture, language, and religion have been severely marginalized in recent decades, which has further fuelled Uyghur discontent (Roberts, 2020). As a result, ethnic conflicts and unrests occurred frequently in Xinjiang before 2017. For example, on July 5, 2009, a massive Uyghur–Han conflict in Ürümqi resulted in at least 197 deaths.⁹

1.2.3 The Xi Era: Radical Integration of Xinjiang Politically, Economically, and Culturally

In order to handle Uyghur unrest and fit Xinjiang into China’s One Belt One Road Initiative, Xi Jinping, different from his predecessors, has adopted radical measures to intensively change the region’s social, political, economic, and cultural structures. The political and socioeconomic restructuring of Xinjiang during Xi’s era is focused on radical securitization, assimilation, and neoliberalism. As a response to overt Uyghur resistance, the Chinese authorities began to securitize Uyghur-concentrated southern Xinjiang in 2012 and then expanded the securitization throughout the region in 2016 when Chen Quanguo—the former head of Tibet who specialized

7 See <http://www.scio.gov.cn/m/xwfbh/xwfbh/wqfbh/2000/0926/Document/327819/327819.htm>.

8 See <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/bg/200207/20020700032608.shtml>.

9 See http://www.gov.cn/zmyw200907c/content_1369230.htm.

in mercilessly “managing” ethnic minority—became the party secretary of Xinjiang (Zenz & Leibold, 2020).

During the first year of Chen’s term in Xinjiang, there were 100,680 security-related jobs advertised in the region, and most of them (97,629) were for formal or assistant police forces (Zenz & Leibold, 2020). The recruits have been used for “convenience police stations,” extensive patrols (24-hour shifts), and checkpoints. In addition to convenience police stations and checkpoints, Chen also built gates, fences, and cameras across the region. When I visited Altay City in 2017, all buildings were enclosed by iron fences with digital security gates, and people needed to use their ID cards to open the gates or show the cards to the assistant police no matter where they went. Moreover, Chen developed ubiquitous social control systems from *Shequ* (Chi. 社区)—a grassroots governmental organ—to Grids and Joint Defence System.¹⁰ The systems cover every household in Xinjiang with daily surveillance and security patrols, which have been not seen in any other regions in mainland China.

While securitizing Xinjiang with unprecedented intensity, Chen has also implemented radical ethnic assimilation policies targeting Turkic Muslims in the region. Since 2017, Chinese authorities have been building large-scale internment camps across Xinjiang to transform the thoughts of Turkic Muslims. In the camps, Turkic Muslims are required to abandon “religious extremism” and embrace a “secular life” by accepting patriotic education and learning the Chinese language, Mandarin (Zenz, 2019). Moreover, since 2016, Chinese authorities have launched the “Jieqin” (Chi. 结亲) campaign to pair ethnic minority households with Han Chinese cadres as kin.¹¹ The primary purpose of the campaign is to create more ethnic interactions between Han Chinese and ethnic minority groups, thus promoting “dynamically

10 See the report from Xinjiang Documentation Project: [Extending Grassroots Power and Mobilizing the People - Xinjiang Documentation Project \(ubc.ca\)](#).

11 The campaign requires Han cadres to do “si tong” (eating together, living together, learning together, and working together) and “si song” (bringing law, bringing policy, bringing civilization, bringing warmth) with and to their ethnic minority “kin.” See [Jieqin 结亲 - Xinjiang Documentation Project \(ubc.ca\)](#).

embedded inter-ethnic communities” (Chi. 多民族互嵌型社区). At the same time, indigenous languages and religions (in particular Islam) have been totally eliminated. In the case of Altay during my fieldwork in 2020, all Kazakh language schools had been permanently closed in both urban and rural regions except the largest Kazakh high school in Altay City, which was partially preserved and gradually transformed into a Chinese school, according to local Kazakhs. All mosques were closed, and the top moons of the buildings were removed. Only a small number of mosques could be temporarily opened exclusively for Muslim funerals.

In addition to the implementation of intense securitization and national assimilation, Chinese authorities have also sped up capital accumulation through the management of ethnic minorities, in particular, Uyghurs. In some re-education camps, Chinese authorities have built warehouse factories directly in the camps in which detained Uyghurs are forced to work.¹² Between 2017 and 2019, more than 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred out of Xinjiang to factories in inland China.¹³ By eliminating Uyghur culture and racializing Uyghur identity as “terrorist,” the Chinese state developed new products and forms of labor to accumulate capital in Xinjiang (Byler, 2018). Nevertheless, not enough research has been done to investigate how Chinese authorities have managed nomadic Muslims—in particular, Kazakhs—in northern Xinjiang for capital accumulation. This study aims to provide a glimpse into the management of Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities in Altay Prefecture in recent years.

1.3 The Geopolitical Importance of Xinjiang and Altay Prefecture

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as China’s westernmost territory, connects China to Russia, Mongolia, and five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). Altay Prefecture, in the northernmost part of Xinjiang, is the only

¹² See the report from Australian Strategic Policy: <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale>.

¹³ Ibid.

place in the region that borders both Russia and Kazakhstan. Hence, as the only place that borders two important member countries in China's One Belt One Road Initiative, Altay Prefecture has an irreplaceable geopolitical importance in China's global strategies.

In world history, Xinjiang, as part of Central Asia, was inhabited by nomads who connected Europe and Iran to India and China in terms of politics, military, economy, technologies, and cultures (Clarke, 2015). Since the 16th Century when modernization took place, Central Asia has been seen as part of the “non-integrating gap” that is outside of the western-defined modernization and globalization (Barnett, 2003). In 1918, the Soviet Union created Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic to control Central Asia, which was then divided into five nation-states (Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) after the fall of the Soviet Union. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia has become a “global fault-line” among global powers, in particular Russia and China (Klare, 2000, pp. 49–61).

Due to the decades of Soviet rule, the Russian language and culture have had a deep impact on Central Asia. The Russian language has official status in three Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kirghizstan—and Central Asians experience the world through Russian television channels and books (Fumagalli, 2010). After a short retreat from Central Asia in the 1990s, Russia restarted its interests in the region after Vladimir Putin became the president in 2000. Putin has revived Russo–Central Asian relations in security and economy by establishing two multilateral organizations: the Eurasian Economy Community and the Collective Security Treaty (Fumagalli, 2010). Nevertheless, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, a conflict broke out between Kirghizstan and Tajikistan, which could signal the fading of Russian influence in the region.¹⁴ In the future, while the Kremlin's attention is pulled away from Central Asia by the ongoing war in Ukraine, China, as the region's closest superpower neighbor, could

¹⁴ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/08/world/asia/russia-putin-soviet.html>.

fill the power vacuum in the region and even step into the Russian territory through Xinjiang.

1.3.1 China and Central Asia

China has been engaging with Central Asia and Russia for decades. As early as 2001, China founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) along with Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kirghizstan to promote cooperation among all members in security, military, economy, education, and international politics. The initial purpose of establishing the SCO was to strengthen China's control over Xinjiang and its relationship with other regional and global powers to counter the U.S. containment in East and Southeast Asia (Clarke, 2010). Nevertheless, with the rapid growth of the economy as well as power in the past decades and the influence of the 2008 financial crisis that dampened China's economic growth, China has been seeking to deepen its economic engagement in the world, including Central Asia.

In order to fuel the Chinese economy through the integration of more resources from the world, Xi Jinping introduced the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBORI) in which Central Asia takes up a significant place. In 2013, when Xi Jinping formally became the president of the PRC, he brought forward the idea of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" on a visit to Kazakhstan, which aimed to further economic cooperation between China and Central Asian states. The idea originated from an ancient trade route, the Silk Road, which stretched "from China's inland and western provinces across central Asia, through the Middle East and ending in the heart of Europe" (Xing, 2018, p. 6). In March 2015, Xi's China enacted "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road."¹⁵

The central idea of the OBORI is to establish two economic belts: one land belt that connects China to Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and a maritime belt that links

¹⁵ See <http://www.sic.gov.cn/News/455/6103.htm>.

China's ports with the African coast and all the way to the Mediterranean. The key messages of the OBORI are developing cooperation among the involved countries in terms of policies, facilities, trades, finances, and cultures.¹⁶ The OBORI reflects China's ambitions to become not only a global mega hub that integrates world resources into the Chinese economy but also a proactive global rule-setter with both land and maritime power, rather than the passive rule-follower it once was decades ago. In order to maintain economic growth and feed more than one-sixth of the world population, China needs to absorb all kinds of energy and food into its economy through the OBORI. At the same time, the OBORI can provide opportunities for China to promote its own norms and values, thus creating political circumstances and a new world order that favors the existence of China's regime. Moreover, the OBORI reflects part of the driving forces of China's foreign policy, which is built upon nostalgia and historical humiliations imposed by the West and Japan (Xing and Duarte, 2016). Thus, the OBORI is also a tangible practice of the "Chinese Dream" that seeks to "revive" the glorious past as the "Middle Kingdom" of the world.

1.3.2 Xinjiang and Altay Prefecture in the OBORI

Xinjiang and Central Asia play vital roles in the OBORI. There are six economic corridors in the OBORI, and three of them place Xinjiang as a central hub. Two of them connect China to Europe and West Asia through Central Asia, and another links China with Pakistan.¹⁷ For example, one of the six corridors, the New Eurasia Land Bridge Corridor, starts from a port of entry between China and Kazakhstan, Alashankou in Bortala Mongol Autonomous Prefecture of Xinjiang.¹⁸ Hence, in order to promote the OBORI, China has been tightening control over Xinjiang and restructuring the region's economy in order to fit it into both China's domestic economy and the OBORI.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 See <http://www.xjboz.gov.cn/info/1935/7021.htm>.

Altay Prefecture, as part of Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang, is located at the northern end of Xinjiang, with four national-level type-1 land ports (Jeminay Port, Hongshanzui Port, Takshiken Port, and Aghetubek Port) and Jeminay national-level Border Economic Cooperation Zone. Moreover, because Altay Prefecture is the only place in Xinjiang that borders both Russia and Kazakhstan, the OBORI assigns the prefecture as an important hub in the northern corridor of Xinjiang's Silk Road Economic Belt.¹⁹ During the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), the Altay government is required to develop a railway between Altay City, Burqin (Kaba), and Jeminay Port in order to link Jeminay Port with the New Eurasia Land Bridge Corridor. The Altay government also needs to lay the foundation for the Western Line Project of Sino–Russian Oil Pipes and Sino–Russian Jikepulin Port in the region.

Central Asia is an important geopolitical location for China's OBORI, and Xinjiang is one of the most important regions for China to achieve the OBORI due to its geographical closeness to other nations. In order to understand how Xinjiang plays a role in shaping geopolitics in Central Asia and Sino–Russian relations, more attention must be paid to border prefectures in the region, such as Altay Prefecture, the only place in Xinjiang that borders both Kazakhstan and Russia. This study explores the state-led neoliberal development in Altay Prefecture through the management of Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities in an important border region in Xinjiang, which might contribute to understandings of how China could use Altay Prefecture to project its global strategies in Russia and Kazakhstan in the future.

1.3.3 Altay Prefecture as a Special Case in Special Xinjiang

Xinjiang, as an important geopolitical location inhabited by Turkic Muslims, is unique in China compared with other ethnic minority regions (e.g., Inner Mongolia). Altay Prefecture, inhabited

¹⁹ See <http://www.altxw.com/ggxx/system/2021/06/22/030089613.shtml>.

by nomadic Kazakhs in the only place where Xinjiang borders both Kazakhstan and Russia, is even more unique within Xinjiang. Xinjiang has an irreplaceable geopolitical importance in the OBORI as well as in responding to U.S. foreign policy. As a bridge connecting China to Central Asian countries, Xinjiang is the window to three of the six most important economic corridors in the OBORI and a vehicle through which China can circumvent U.S. containment in the East and Southeast Asia.

In addition to Xinjiang's powerful geopolitical location, it has been mainly inhabited by Turkic Muslims, the ethnic minorities that are most foreign to Han Chinese in terms of religion, culture, language, and even racial features. A study conducted in 2004 by Xinjiang Social Sciences Faculty Ethnic Research Institute, a Chinese state-owned institute specializing in ethnic studies in Xinjiang, shows that Muslim ethnic groups had very low inter-ethnic marriages with Han Chinese. Among 10 Muslim minorities in China, nine of them displayed inter-ethnic marriage rates below 10 percent, and six of them are indigenous groups in Xinjiang (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Tajiks).

The low ethnic integration in the important geopolitical frontier has been concerning Chinese authorities and impairing many state practices that have been working in other ethnic minority regions (e.g., Inner Mongolia and Yunnan Province). For example, ethnic tourism industries successfully implemented since the 1980s in Yunnan Province, an ethnic minority region in southwest China, could not be easily replicated in Xinjiang (Swain, 1989). In Xinjiang, ethnic conflicts before 2015 (in particular, between Uyghurs and Han Chinese) and low ethnic integration rates between Turkic Muslims and Han Chinese are the embodiments of ethnic mistrust and antagonism, which has lasted even during the crackdown (Qu, 2022). Hence, in Xinjiang, Chinese authorities have been encountering some of the strongest resistance from Turkic Muslims, which has rarely been seen in other ethnic minority regions except for Tibet. The resistance from Turkic Muslims and the geopolitical importance of Xinjiang have forced

Chinese authorities to take a tailored route for the colonial restructuring of the region since 1949.

Within Xinjiang, Altay Prefecture is even more unique than other prefectures due to its shared border with OBORI member countries and its population of nomadic Kazakhs, who are considered harder to be governed than other sedentary Turkic Muslim groups (e.g., Uyghurs). Compared with Uyghurs, Kazakh nomads have a higher degree of mobility as well as autonomy. It is difficult for Chinese authorities to track and govern Kazakh nomads since they migrate seasonally and do not have permanent addresses. As a result, in Altay Prefecture, Chinese authorities have had to design a unique approach to manage nomadic Kazakhs. In this study, I examine Altay Prefecture as a unique case to explicate how the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation through the management of the Kazakh nomads and their land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities.

2.0 Theoretical Framework: Dispossession and Capital Accumulation through the Management of Land, Ethnicity, Culture, and Reproduction

In this study, the management of ethnicity and culture is central to the specific set of programs implemented in Altay Prefecture which predominantly target Kazakhs. Hence, I build my argument upon literature that focuses on how the production of ethnicity and culture creates value for capital accumulation. In this chapter, I review the literature on dispossession and capital accumulation through the management of land, race and ethnicity, culture, and domestic social reproductive activities, which is essential to building my analysis and arguments. In societies dominated by capitalist relations, capital accumulation is often one of the primary drivers of social relations. According to Marx (1976), primitive accumulation, the starting point of capitalist development, separates self-sufficient producers from their means of production. As a result, land and resources are dispossessed/commodified, and people become waged laborers who can only survive by selling their labor power. After that, state power continues to secure favorable conditions for capital accumulation in order to address the issue of overaccumulation (Harvey, 2003), which continuously restructures social relations. To Harvey (2005), China's economic growth since 1978 provides an example of accumulation by dispossession, which is manifested by vast proletarianization and commodification of formerly collective activities.

In the process of capital accumulation, aside from land and natural resources, race, ethnicity, and culture can also be produced for value. As Melamed (2015) argued, capital has always been accumulated “through relations of severe inequality among human groups—capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed” (p. 77). Hence, race, ethnicity, and ethnic culture, as ways to differentiate humans, are intrinsically involved in the process of capitalist development. The following discussion summarizes the literature on primitive accumulation; accumulation by dispossession, neoliberalism, land grabbing; and accumulation through race,

ethnicity, culture, and social reproductive activities.

2.1 Capital Accumulation, Chinese Neoliberalism, and Land Dispossession

In this section, I discuss all key concepts I draw on to analyze the recent Kazakh land dispossession in Altay Prefecture, concepts including Marx's primitive accumulation, land dispossession, Chinese neoliberalism, Harvey's accumulation by dispossession, and green grabbing. In the findings chapter, I adopt Marx's primitive accumulation through state violence and green grabbing coined by Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones (2012) to analyze how Chinese authorities dispossess Kazakh land in the name of ecological protection. I then draw on insights from Harvey's accumulation by dispossession to examine how Kazakh land dispossession continues in the Chinese neoliberal context for capital accumulation during the development of three industries (husbandry, agriculture, and tourism).

Primitive accumulation, translated from Adam Smith's previous accumulation, originally refers to the mythical past of capital accumulation prior to the division of labor (Perelman, 2000). Marx, however, rejected Smith's account by revealing the brutal acts related to the process of dispossession and accumulation. In Marx's (1976) perspective, primitive accumulation explains the starting point of capitalist social relations which separates commoners from their means of production and transforms them into waged laborers through violence. When any land or social formation is brought into a capitalist system, it must experience a comprehensive shift of the socioeconomic and political structures which separate commoners from the means of production through predation, fraud, and violence. Land, as a fundamental resource for human livelihood, identity, and culture, has always been a main target of formal subsumption by capitalist power (e.g., colonization and imperialism). In pre-capitalist societies, land ownership was often determined by customary agreements that are considered fluid and ambiguous, and commoners practiced self-sufficient production on their land "outside" of capitalism (Ho & Spoor, 2006).

Hence, land grabbing is often the first step to building capitalist social relations.

In the accelerated expansion of global capitalism guided by neoliberalism, people all over the world continue to be dispossessed, and non-capitalist or “backward” capitalist modes of production are replaced by more “advanced” ones (Hall, 2013). In the Global South, however, different from Marx’s accounts of how commoners’ land was dispossessed by capitalists, many contemporary land grabs have been driven by neoliberalism and have occurred in state/collective-owned sectors where public property is sometimes more available for capital through a corrupted government (Kelly, 2013). Neoliberalism, a political-economic doctrine opposing active government intervention in order to secure private property arrangements, market institutions, and entrepreneurial activity (Harvey, 2003), varies throughout place and time (Heyes et al., 2012; Liverman & Vilas, 2006). While neoliberalism in Latin America at large features deregulation, free trade, and privatization, which accords with the Washington Consensus mode, China has adopted a unique path of neoliberalism that oscillates between market-oriented practices and state-led interventions (Liverman & Vilas, 2006; So & Chu, 2012).

In the Chinese mode of neoliberalism, the CCP has used strong state machinery to actively and proactively intervene in the market economy in a nationalist authoritarian context (So & Chu, 2012). As a result, in the mode of neoliberalism, land grabbing has been conducted in a unique way in China. For example, since the 1990s, the Chinese state has been grabbing rural land through housing privatization and urban development (Andreas et al., 2020). Moreover, since 2007, the state has begun acting as a land broker to transfer over one-third of farmland in rural China from smallholders to large farm operators, which along with rapid urbanization dispossesses many rural populations (Andrea et al., 2020). In ethnic minority regions (e.g., Xinjiang and Tibet), the Chinese state has been grabbing land by displacing nomads (e.g., Tibetans and Kazakhs) under the pretext of ecological protection (Kernan, 2013; Salimjan, 2021). In the Chinese neoliberal context, the party-state has used its powerful state mechanism to

proactively facilitate land grabbing in rural regions.

Though Marx's concept of primitive accumulation has been widely adopted by many critical scholars, it risks limiting the violent accumulation process to an original stage (Harvey, 2003). As Harvey (2003) suggested, "capitalism always requires a fund of assets outside of itself if it is to confront and circumvent pressures of overaccumulation" (Harvey, 2003, p. 143). Since the accumulation is still ongoing, Harvey (2003) coined "accumulation by dispossession" to describe "the necessary cost of making a successful breakthrough into capitalist development with the strong backing of state powers" (p. 154). Through financialization and state-led orchestration, capitalist development continues to privatize public resources in order to handle the problems of overaccumulation in a savage way that leaves the majority vulnerable.

Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession echoes the latest development of global land grabbing in the name of crisis management (Borras et al., 2012). For example, the food crisis since 2008—the end of cheap food—has accelerated land dispossession in the Global South in the name of production "efficiencies," "free trade," and "global food security," which destabilizes populations, environments, and the climate (McMichael, 2012). In the neoliberal food regime dominated by the Global North, agribusiness has been prioritized in the global food trade through financialization and privatization, which leaves small- and medium-sized farms vulnerable (McMichael, 2005).

Moreover, Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones (2012) coined "green grabbing" to describe the emerging approach of land appropriation for environmental ends. Different from land dispossession in the name of "food security," in green grabbing, environmental agendas are the core drivers of land dispossession. In green grabbing, new actors have emerged, such as venture capitalists, GIS service providers, ecotourism companies, and green activists, who value and commodify natural environments in a new way. In the processes of privatization and

financialization, nature has become a business asset that can provide ecosystem products and services, such as carbon storage, solar absorption, biofuel production, and tourism revenues (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012). Since then, green grabbing has been widely adopted by scholars to analyze land dispossessions in Mexico, Cambodia, and Chile (Green & Adams, 2015; Holmes, 2014; Rocheleau, 2015; Scheidel & Work, 2018). In Xinjiang, Chinese authorities have been dispossessing Kazakh land in the name of Ecological Civilization (Salimjan, 2021).

2.2 Capital Accumulation through the Production of Race and Ethnicity

In this section, I unfold literature on how the production of race and ethnicity generates value for capital accumulation, which is then used in the findings chapter for the analysis of Kazakh–Han inequality and the articulation of Kazakh-related industries into the Chinese economy. Race and ethnicity are both discursive constructs that operate through the making of meaningful distinctions (Hall, 2017). While the concept of race emphasizes physical differences on the body as privileged signifiers, the concept of ethnicity is more focused on cultural differences (e.g., languages, traditions, religious beliefs, cultural ideas, customs, and rituals) (Hall, 2017). Through cultural distinctions of race, ethnicity, history, gender, sexuality, and social class, nationality has been constructed to produce meaning and construct identification within and across human groups (Hall, 2017). In the Chinese context, the term *minzu* (Chi. 民族) is used interchangeably for nation, nationality, ethnicity, and race (Chu, 2018). Despite the ambiguous definition of *minzu*, Chinese authorities use the term *zhonghua minzu* (Chi. 中华民族) to refer to a united Chinese nation across cultural differences in China (Chu, 2018). In order to manage cultural distinctions, Chinese authorities coined the term *shaoshu minzu* (Chi. 少数民族) to refer to ethnic minorities in China, which implies the dominant role of Han Chinese as an ‘elder brother’ in economic and cultural areas to set an example for other ethnic groups (Barabantseva, 2008). In this study, I regard Kazakhs and Han Chinese in China as both discursive constructs based on

cultural difference.

Since capital can only accumulate through unequal relations among human groups (Melamed, 2015), race and ethnicity, as basic units of human differentiation, are intrinsically involved in the process of capital accumulation. The downplaying of race and ethnicity is considered one of the major blind spots in Harvey's (2003) work on capital accumulation. Dantzler (2021) argues that racial inequalities are not the consequences of uneven development but the central components of capital accumulation. In order to describe the racist nature of capitalism, "racial capitalism" is used (Leong, 2013; Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 2000). Based on racial hierarchies, capital accumulation has been achieved through expropriation and exploitation (Leong, 2013; Melamed, 2015). Since resource expropriation continues to happen on the land of indigenous communities, indigenous groups are made to be the racial Other based on economic rationalities to facilitate expropriation (Melamed, 2015). Furthermore, in a racially diverse society, people's racial identities are commodified and exploited to make value for the institutions dominated by the privileged race (Leong, 2013).

Though the concept of racial capitalism is primarily used to examine accumulation through racial difference, it can also be used to explain accumulation through the *making* of ethnic difference since the central idea of the concept is the value making through human differentiation, which can be either biological or cultural. Racial capitalism can explain hierarchies and segregation in the job market in which racial and ethnic minorities are concentrated in low-paid occupations while the majority occupies high-salary job positions (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). In the case of China, though some ethnic minorities have achieved greater educational attainment than the dominant Han Chinese, they are concentrated in low-paid industries while their Han counterparts are more likely to work in high-wage sectors (Hasmath, 2008). This ethnic segregation is also significant in Xinjiang where Uyghurs are concentrated in low-status and low-wage sectors while their Han counterparts dominate high-paid occupations (Hasmath, 2019). Through ethnic

hierarchies, ethnic minority identities are made and exploited for capital accumulation. In this study, I use the term Chinese racial capitalism to examine how Kazakh–Han segregation and hierarchies have been created in three industries (husbandry, agriculture, and tourism), which exploit the Kazakh identity and facilitate dispossession and capital accumulation in Altay Prefecture.

Beyond racial and ethnic inequalities at a local level, hierarchies have also merged with the capitalist world economy (Robinson, 2000). In the early development of capitalism by the Europeans, capitalism pursued racial directions by differentiating and exaggerating “regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into ‘racial’ ones” (Robinson, 2000, p. 26). The current global capitalist systems, built upon the legacies of European colonialism and imperialism, have created a global inequality gap between rich, powerful nations and poor, powerless ones (Milanovic, 2016). Moreover, within each country, regional inequalities also exist, which might imply new forms of racialization for capital accumulation.

For example, China has experienced serious regional inequality issues since 1978, in which the western region (mainly inhabited by ethnic minorities) and the central region have a significantly lower GDP per capita than that of the eastern region (Fan & Sun, 2008). The inequality was intensified by state economic policy that favors the coastal provinces since the Economic Reform (Aguignier, 1988; Chai, 1996; Lakshmanan & Hua, 1987). In Xinjiang, moreover, prefectures predominantly inhabited by Uyghurs, Kirghiz, and Kazakhs (e.g., Hotan, Kizilsu, and Altay) have a significantly lower GDP per capita than prefectures predominantly inhabited by Han Chinese (e.g., Ürümqi and Karamay).²⁰ In this study, I draw on the concept of racial capitalism to study—in the three industries of husbandry, agriculture, and tourism—how Altay Prefecture has been integrated into the Chinese national economy and how the Kazakh identity has been exploited in these industries for Chinese capital accumulation.

20 The calculation of GDP per capita for each Prefecture in Xinjiang is based on the data from the Statistic Bureau of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

2.3 Capital Accumulation through the Production of Culture

Culture is always central to the making of ethnic difference in the capitalist development. Along with the ethnic identity that is exploited, the culture is also commodified, alienated, and replaced in order to produce value for capital accumulation. In this section, I summarize the literature on how ethnic culture is commodified, alienated, and replaced or eliminated for capital accumulation, and I draw on the literature to analyze how Kazakh culture in Altay Prefecture is remade by the Chinese state for accumulation. The cultural turn in the political economy highlights the importance of semiotic analysis in capitalist social formations (Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008). Today, forms of capital accumulation are not only limited to economic and material conditions but also venture into the symbolic field (Fitchett et al., 2021). Hence, in order to understand the development of modern capitalism, the operation of power in both material and symbolic fields in which cultural products and performances are commodified must be analyzed.

The commodification of ethnic material culture, such as clothing, decorations, instruments, and utensils, is common in tourism. Similar to other manufactured commodities in the market, these tangible cultural products facilitate capital accumulation by producing value through labor time in production (Fitchett et al., 2021). In many cases, however, intangible cultural performances, such as ethnic music and dance, religious rituals, and holidays, are also commodified and sold to tourists (Kaifa Roland, 2010; Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Mbaiwa, 2011; Su, 2011). Different from tangible cultural products whose value is derived from labor time, commodified cultural performances generate use value to satisfy tourists (Young & Markham, 2020).

The commodification of cultural performances, however, can bring harmful impacts on local communities. Cultural alienation is a direct result of cultural commodity exchange. When cultural commodification occurs, local/ethnic culture is changed and remade into commercial

products that lose cultural and traditional meaning to the locals (Greenwood, 1989). In China, the development of ethnic tourism—in particular, in southwest minority regions in the past decades—has reflected a cultural loss caused by commodification (Xie, 2003; Yang & Wall, 2009). In some cases, however, local communities exert their autonomy to evolve their culture into ethnic tourism (Su, 2011; Xie, 2003)

In some cases, the colonial power seeks not to commodify the indigenous culture but totally replace it with a foreign one, which is known as cultural genocide (Davidson, 2012). Global capitalism, which pursues endless expansion, is intrinsically genocidal since it takes the life and culture of indigenous people through land grabbing and ecological destruction (Crook & Short, 2014). Hence, there is an intimate relationship between capital accumulation and cultural genocide. In the case of Xinjiang, the Chinese state has built a special form of capitalism—“terror capitalism,” which develops new products and forms of labor through land grabbing, cultural genocide, and the restructuring of livelihoods—to use against indigenous groups (e.g., Uyghurs and Kazakhs) (Byler, 2018). In the case of Kazakhs in Altay Prefecture, Kazakh culture has been commodified, alienated, replaced, and eliminated. In the findings chapter, I draw on the literature above to explicate how Kazakh culture has been remade for capital accumulation in the past decade.

2.4 Capital Accumulation and Domestic Reproduction

The separation of productive and social reproductive activities, caused by primitive accumulation, also intensely restructures the domestic sector. Capitalist development requires a spatial separation between economic productive and social reproductive activities, which further creates individual laborers who produce surplus values for capital accumulation. As a result, the burden of reproduction and provision for laborers falls on the shoulders of women who receive no monetary compensation (Razavi, 2009). While households provide workers in productive

sectors for capital accumulation, productive sectors give goods, services, and value back to households (Razavi, 2009). This new form of social reproduction in capitalist societies serves capital accumulation by supporting productive activities. In this study, I examine not only the separation of Kazakh productive and social reproductive activities but also how productive activities step into the space of reproduction in order to directly exploit social reproductive activities.

3.0 Research Methods: Case Study

3.1 Choice of Methods

I examine Altay Prefecture, an important border region predominantly inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, as an intrinsic case to study how the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation through the management of Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities. Case study as a qualitative research method aims to enrich the understanding of a phenomenon by interpreting the meaning of data from a case (Stake, 1995). Altay Prefecture, as the intrinsic case for this study, is not selected but assigned based on accessibility (Stake, 1995). Compared with other prefectures in Xinjiang, to me, Altay Prefecture is the most convenient field to access and collect data that could maximize my analysis of the phenomenon. As a local resident in Altay City who has many acquaintances and connections to indigenous knowledge in the city, I am familiar with the landscape in both urban and rural regions in Altay City and know how to find reliable informants. Thus, in this context, I can conduct ethnographic work better, making Altay Prefecture an intrinsic case for this study. Since Altay Prefecture is an intrinsic case, I seek to develop a thorough understanding of the case based on interpretation of the data rather than generalization.

My data-gathering plan is based on initial observations, feasibility, and safety. At the beginning of my ethnographic work in Altay City, I was shocked by the massive influx of rural Kazakhs in urban regions and the rapid change of the political economy in the region. With the questions of why and how the change had happened, I contacted my Kazakh acquaintances and conducted a three-month-long ethnography in Altay Prefecture (Altay City and Burqin County). During the ethnography, I wrote field notes on my observations of approximately 50 sites with more than 400 pictures and casual conversations with the local residents. The ethnography helps me examine the lived experiences and impacts of the policies on the ground. Due to Chen's crackdown against Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang since 2016, however, I was not able to conduct

surveys and interviews in an ethical way. Altay Prefecture, as a major hub for ethnic Kazakhs, one of the targeted ethnicities during the crackdown, has witnessed draconian extrajudicial detentions and securitizations.²¹ During the crackdown, compliant surveys and interviews are only feasible when a scholar is doing research for a Chinese-affiliated institution (e.g., a university or research institute under the supervision of Chinese authorities).

I then built on ethnographic work by conducting a thorough investigation of both official and unofficial documents, which contribute the majority of the data I used in the findings chapter. The online data, in particular social policies and official reports, have provided the foundation for this study since they provide detailed, reliable descriptions of key policies, regulations, and laws. News reports, as another important data source, provide detailed but propagandized information on how the policies, regulations, and laws are implemented on the ground. Other data, including ethnographic work, statistics, and personal blogs, provide complementary evidence for the arguments in this study.

3.2 Setting

This study is mainly focused on Altay Prefecture, which includes one city and six counties: Altay City, Qinggil County, Burultogay County, Jeminay County, Kaba County, Koktoghay County, Burqin County. Except for in Altay City and Burultogay County, the Kazakhs constitute the majority in these counties. Chart 1 shows the ethnic distribution in Altay Prefecture according to the latest Xinjiang Statistics Yearbook from 2020. Between September and November 2020, I conducted fieldwork in Altay City and Burqin County at urban, rural, and pastoral levels.

21 See Xinjiang Victims Database, which records 2,524 ethnic Kazakhs who were or are detained in extrajudicial camps and 497 camp victims in Altay Prefecture: <https://shahit.biz/eng/#stats>.

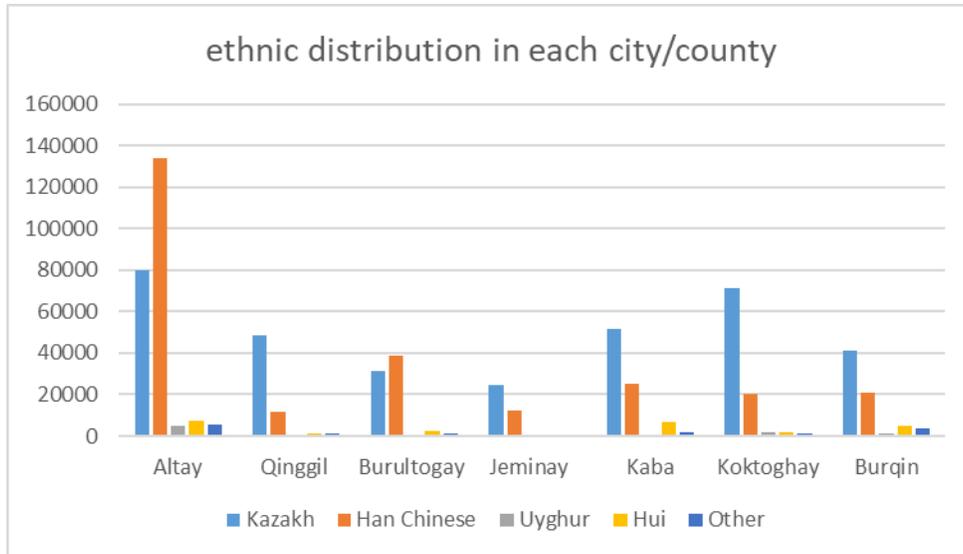


Figure 1. Ethnic distribution in each city/county

3.3 Ethnography

Ethnography is a research method that studies people’s ordinary activities and their social meanings “in naturally occurring settings” (Brewer, 2000, p. 10). For this reason, ethnography is a great method to be used in this study since I research how Chinese policies affect the ordinary activities of ethnic Kazakhs in Altay Prefecture. In the ethnographic work, I used participant observation techniques, which require a balance between “insider” and “outsider” status (Brewer, 2000). As a native-born person with a complex ethnic background (Mongol, Manchu, and Han), my status was flexible during the ethnographic work. Sometimes I was recognized as an insider by Kazakhs when I attended their ceremonies with Kazakh friends or Mongol relatives. Sometimes, however, I was recognized as an outsider by rural Kazakhs since my Kazakh language was limited. My flexible status helped me maintain a subtle balance between insider and outsider as observer-as-participant during the fieldwork.

Between September and November 2020, I conducted ethnographic work in Altay Prefecture. Specifically, I did fieldwork in Altay City, Burqin County, Chemurchek Village, Lasti Village,

First Pasture, Hem Village, and other small Kazakh villages nearby Altay City. During the fieldwork, I visited approximately 50 different sites and took more than 400 photos of the sites. Certain sites (e.g., the agricultural project in Lasti Village) were observed multiple times while other sites (e.g., Hem Village) were observed only once. In Altay City, I visited religious sites, parks, construction zones, schools, villages, pastures, farmlands, greenhouses, innovative institutes, tourist sites, local markets, commercial sites, governmental sites, hospitals, communities, and private spaces (Kazakh and Han homes). Informal conversations were conducted with locals, mainly Kazakh and Han, during the fieldwork. Those conversations related mainly to the recent changes on the aforementioned sites and people's activities, experiences, opinions, and emotions.

3.4 Document Collection

I followed two principles during document collection. First, the data sources must be credible. For example, I mainly collected social policies and official reports from official government websites and local authoritative news agencies, such as the official websites of the Altay Prefecture administrative office, Altay City government, and other county governments. Local news reports were collected on Altay News Website, which is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party Altay Prefecture Committee Propaganda Department to propagate key policies in the region. Personal blogs and social media documents were collected on renowned Chinese websites, such as Hornet Nest and Weibo. Second, the policies must be reliable and implemented on the ground. In the cases of agriculturalization and ethnic tourism, I conducted ethnographic work to examine the implementation of the policies. Some policies, which appeared many times in different credible data sources, are also considered reliable. During the document collection process, I downloaded all social policies, regulations, and laws in PDF format while preserving all original links in a Word file and archiving some important links that are likely to be deleted later by the Chinese authorities.

3.5 Social Policy Analysis

In the process of data analysis, I drew insights from a seven-step analytical framework by Sum (2009) to critically analyze the social policies I collected for this study. First, where do particular policy ideas and their related discursive networks originate? Second, which actors, individual and collective, get involved in the policy discursive networks that construct objects of political and economic governance? Third, what ideas (or knowledge brands) are selected and drawn upon to recontextualize the referents of these objects? Fourth, how do these ideas enter policy discourse and everyday practices? Fifth, how do these modes of thought discipline and/or governmentalize the organization of spaces, policies, and diverse populations? Sixth, how do they become part of the hegemonic logic challenged by diverse social forces? Seventh, how are they challenged and negotiated to maintain unstable equilibria of compromise? In this study, I mainly focused on the first five steps because of limited data. Since I cannot access the policymakers and internal policies in Altay Prefecture, here I only trace when and how the policy discourses are referenced, operationalized, and legitimized.

3.6 Ethical Issues

In order to avoid potential harm to local residents in Altay Prefecture, I did not take any portraits during the fieldwork. I took fieldnotes of informal conversations with local residents without recording any real names. In order to protect people who had conversations with me, I digitalized and destroyed the original copy of the fieldnotes, and then I encrypted the digital copy along with the photos in a hard drive. In this paper, no specific individual can be identified through any data presented. The ethnographic data used in this study have been approved by the research ethics board at the University of Alberta.

3.7 Personal Reflections

During the fieldwork, I only visited Altay City and Burqin County, while the other five counties are uninvestigated. In particular, 80 percent of the fieldwork data were generated based on my observations in Altay City and nearby villages. Hence, the situations in the other five counties are mainly analyzed through Chinese official data sources. As a local in Altay City with a multi-ethnic background, I am surrounded by local Kazakhs and Han Chinese and understand both of their positions in the situation. Nevertheless, as a critical scholar, I position myself on the side of indigenous Kazakhs since they are the biggest victims and most powerless people in Altay Prefecture.

4.0 Findings: Dispossession and Capital Accumulation in Kazakh Homeland

In this chapter, based on the documents and ethnographic work, I present how the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation through an intensive Kazakh project, a series of rational management of Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities, in Altay Prefecture since the 2010s. In Altay Prefecture, since the mass of land belonged to Kazakh nomads, the largest ethnic group in the region, the Chinese state had been struggling to integrate the region into the Chinese economy. As the indigenous Turkic Muslim nomads in Altay Prefecture for centuries, Kazakhs not only owned the land with rich resources but are also very foreign to Han Chinese in terms of religion, culture, language, and even physical features. Moreover, Kazakhs have been resisting the Chinese rules as well as ethnic integration through military means before 1950, exodus, and intra-ethnic marriage. Hence, since the consolidation of Chinese rule in the region in 1950 when Ospan Batyr, the leader of the military rebellion, was executed, Chinese authorities have been struggling to deal with Kazakhs as well as the local economy. Since 2010, however, the Chinese state has carved out a Kazakh project with clear purposes, a specific timeline, and a combination of effective means to manage Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities and achieve capital accumulation in an intensity that has never been seen.

This chapter comprises four parts: ideologies, land grabbing, sedentarization, and three industries. In the first part, I introduce two important ideologies—Ecological Civilization and the Anti-Poverty War in Xi's era—which have been shaping local policies and practices in Altay Prefecture since the 2010s. Based on Ecological Civilization, the Chinese state has grabbed Kazakh land and achieved primitive capital accumulation in Altay Prefecture. Justified by the Anti-Poverty War, the Chinese state has sedentarized Kazakh nomads and further integrated them into the Chinese market process. Through the management of Kazakh nomads in five major aspects—land, ethnic identity, culture, the relationship between production and reproduction, and

articulation of the economy—the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation on its far-west ethnic minority borders. As a result, Kazakh land is dispossessed, culture alienated, commodified, and eliminated; ethnic identity exploited and discriminated against; and social reproductive activities separated from and invaded by production ones.

4.1 The Ideological Foundations of the Kazakh Project: Ecological Civilization and the Anti-Poverty War

Ecological Civilization and the Anti-Poverty War, which address ecological crises and regional inequalities, respectively, are two of the most important ideologies in Xi's era, which, according to Chinese authorities, represent the superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Pan, 2006; Wang and Chen, 2022). This part provides the background and main content of the two ideologies that have shaped the Kazakh policies in Altay Prefecture in the name of ecology, economy, and equity. The reason why the two ideologies have become prominent in Xi's era can be traced back to the 2008 financial crisis that forced the CCP to seek alternative ideologies to maintain its legitimacy.

Impacted by the 2008 financial crisis, China's economic growth has been significantly dampened (Schmidt, 2009). Between 1999 and 2007, China's GDP growth had steadily increased from 7.7 percent to 14.2 percent; however, it began to decrease from 9.7 percent in 2008 to 6 percent in 2019, according to data from the World Bank.²² The decline of GDP growth has concerned Chinese authorities since their legitimacy largely relies on economic performance (Zhu, 2011). Since the Economic Reform in 1978, Chinese authorities began to adopt a pragmatic strategy to maintain its "performance legitimacy" through economic growth, social stability, and the growth of national power (Zhu, 2011). While performance legitimacy has justified the rule of the CCP, it also brings trouble when the Party does not perform well in those key areas. Therefore, when

22 See annual GDP growth in China: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>.

China's economic growth began to slow down in 2008, Chinese authorities also began to worry that their legitimacy might be shaken.

Since the 2010s, in order to maintain their legitimacy, Chinese authorities have been exploring new routes for its governance performance as a response to the declining growth of the economy. In particular, when Xi Jinping became China's chairman in 2012, he brought three new routes for strengthening the Party's legitimacy. First, Xi's China began to adopt a more active role in international trade to maintain its economic growth. For example, in the OBORI, China tries to integrate laborers and consumers, land, and resources into the Chinese economy across Eurasia, East Africa, and Southeast Asia. Second, Xi Jinping has used Ecological Civilization as a solution to the increasingly alarming ecological problems in China. Third, in 2015, Xi Jinping launched a war on poverty, trying to close the huge income gap between the rich and poor in China. Through the three new routes, Xi's China is trying to handle some of the most important problems—economic decline, ecological crises, and regional inequalities—in China, thus maintaining the CCP's legitimacy. In Altay Prefecture, an important hub for China's OBORI, the three routes intersect with each other in the Kazakh project.

4.1.1 Ecological Civilization (Chi. 生态文明建设)

From 2007 to 2018, Ecological Civilization had been gradually put into a significant position in the CCP's congress, China's constitution, and Xi Jinping's Thought, highlighting the increasing importance of the concept in China's ruling ideologies and practices in Xi's era. The term "Ecological Civilization" was coined by the Soviet Union in 1984; however, it has been highly adopted and developed in China since 2007 (Gare, 2012). In the Chinese adoption of the concept, Pan Yue, a member of the CCP central committee, has played a critical role. Pan Yue (2006) explained the concept of socialist Ecological Civilization, which is based on harmony between humans, nature, and society to achieve sustainable development. The concept then emerged in

the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2007, where Chinese authorities mentioned “building Ecological Civilization” for the first time, aimed at sustainable, economic development that can save resources and protect ecological environments.²³

Five years later, when Xi Jinping became China’s chairman in the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese authorities prioritized Ecological Civilization. It was discussed in the whole eighth chapter of the congress report, which required the party members to build Ecological Civilization in all aspects of Chinese society.²⁴ The chapter elaborates on four ways to build Ecological Civilization: optimizing spatial planning, saving resources, protecting ecological environments, and strengthening laws and regulations. In March 2018, during the 13th National People’s Congress, Ecological Civilization was first written into the PRC’s constitution, which added it in the preface and requires the State Council to “lead and manage” its construction. Meanwhile, Ecological Civilization has gradually become one of the five pillars of Xi Jinping’s Thought, along with Economy, Rule by Law, Strengthening Military, and Diplomacy, which signifies the importance of Ecological Civilization in China’s national policies and practices in Xi’s era.²⁵

The development of Ecological Civilization in Xi’s era reflects a shift in economic development strategies from extensive growth to a more intensive and sustainable one. Ecological Civilization aims to achieve both economic growth and ecological protection, thus strengthening the CCP’s legitimacy in two ways. First, Ecological Civilization provides an alternative to developing an economy that, according to CCP, can last forever, thus providing people with a vision for a bright future and mobilizing them for the transformation (Gare, 2012). Second, according to CCP scholars, Ecological Civilization reflects the superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics as well as Xi Jinping’s Thoughts (Pan, 2006; Wang and Chen, 2022). In the CCP’s ideologies,

23 See http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/npc/zt/2007-10/29/content_374272.htm.

24 See the full congress report: https://www.guancha.cn/politics/2012_11_18_110056.shtml.

25 See <https://www.12371.cn/special/xxzd/hxnr/>.

Ecological Civilization, as a socialist economic development mode, can address one of the largest problems stemming from capitalist development: the conflict between economic growth and ecological protection. Hence, Ecological Civilization legitimizes the CCP's rule by showing the claimed superiority of socialism in dealing with this conflict.

The formal adoption of Ecological Civilization in Altay Prefecture started in March 2013 when a Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Party and Standing Committees meeting was held in Altay by the party secretary of Xinjiang at the time, Zhang Chunxian. In the meeting, Zhang Chunxian emphasized that the building of Ecological Civilization should be regarded as a life-preserving, huge issue.²⁶ On the same day, Altay Prefecture Ecological Environmental Protection Regulations were approved by the 12 People's Congress Committee of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.²⁷ Since then, the Altay authorities began to seriously adopt Ecological Civilization in the region. In Altay Prefecture, the building of Ecological Civilization has been mainly achieved through targeting the herding activities of Kazakh nomads who inhabit the massive grassland in the region. In what follows, I use data from governmental policies, laws, regulations, news reports, and chronicles in Altay Prefecture to analyze how Chinese authorities have achieved primitive capital accumulation through land grabbing against Kazakh nomads in the name of Ecological Civilization.

4.1.2 Anti-Poverty War (Chi. 脱贫攻坚战)

The Anti-Poverty War is a movement launched by Xi Jinping on November 29, 2015, which aims to reduce the huge income gap between urban and rural regions in mainland China caused by uneven economic development in the past decades.²⁸ On the same day of the launch, China's Central Party Committee and the State Council announced the Decision on Winning Anti-

26 See <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0409/c64094-21064928.html>.

27 See <http://www.altxw.com/ggxx/system/2017/08/17/009489171.shtml>.

28 See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-11/28/content_5017921.htm.

Poverty War, aiming to alleviate 70 million poor people before 2020 in rural regions, especially in western and middle regions.²⁹ The decision required the local governments to conduct precise poverty alleviation measures and align the poverty alleviation process with Ecological Civilization. The local governments were permitted to use “unregular measures” and “tough methods” in order to achieve the state goal in time. The Anti-Poverty War aims to achieve the fundamental requirement of socialism, which is common prosperity (Chi. 共同富裕), an egalitarian socialist ideology dating back to 1953 (Dunford, 2022). Xi Jinping regards common prosperity as part of the fundamental legitimacy of the party’s rule, which could not only demonstrate the superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics in comparison with Western capitalism but also ease Chinese people’s discontent stemming from economic inequalities (Liu et al., 2021).

The Anti-Poverty War was then adopted in Xinjiang and Altay Prefecture in the following year. In February 2016, the Party Committee and the government of Xinjiang announced comments on “A Decision on Winning Anti-Poverty War by the Central Party Committee and the State Council,” which specify how to adopt the decision in Xinjiang.³⁰ According to the comments, the Anti-Poverty War in Xinjiang has special political significance on ethnic unity and border stability. Moreover, the comments required local authorities to use a modern information system to target 2.6 million poor people, identify their labor capacities, and design precise measures (e.g., education, labor transfer, and ecological compensation) to alleviate their poverty status. The comments specifically emphasized that poverty alleviation measures should accommodate the Ecological Civilization, thus encouraging local governments to develop “green” husbandry, agriculture, and tourism that are presumably eco-friendly.

In the comments, the Xinjiang authorities required the Altay governments, which are responsible

29 See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-12/07/content_5020963.htm.

30 See http://www.china.com.cn/lianghui/fangtan/2016-02/18/content_37818171.htm.

for two impoverished counties (Qinggil and Jeminay) populated mainly by Kazakh herders, to finish the poverty alleviation in 2017. As a result, in May 2016, the administrative office of Altay prefecture announced the “Poverty Alleviation and Livelihood Improvements Special Act of Altay Prefecture,” which aimed to alleviate all impoverished counties (Jeminay and Qinggil) and villages before 2017.³¹ Below, I show how Altay authorities have achieved dispossession and capital accumulation by building husbandry, agriculture, and tourist industries in the name of poverty alleviation.

4.2 Chinese Ecological Civilization Against Kazakh Nomadism: Land Grabbing and Primitive Capital Accumulation in Altay Prefecture

In order to grip the massive land and manage Kazakh nomads in Altay Prefecture, the first step of Chinese authorities is to control Kazakh mobility through land grabbing and sedentarization projects. First, as nomads seasonally migrating on the vast grassland and forest, Kazakhs do not have fixed home addresses, and they also have limited exchanges with the broader Chinese economy. Hence, the high autonomy of Kazakh nomads has made the Chinese administration of this group difficult. Second, nomadic Kazakh children often accept family education on the Kazakh language and culture rather than Mandarin and Chinese values at schools. As a result, nomadic Kazakhs, compared with their sedentarized counterparts, are more likely to preserve their language, culture, and identity and are therefore less likely to be integrated into the Chinese nation. Third, Kazakh nomads inhabit the vast grassland in the region, the land that has capital value to the Chinese state in many ways (e.g., mining, husbandry, agriculture, and tourism). Therefore, to Chinese authorities, separating Kazakh nomads from their land is key to the Kazakh project.

Though Chinese authorities have been dealing with Kazakh land since the 1950s, the green

31 The original announcement was deleted from the official website of Altay Prefecture Administrative Office. I found an archive copy on a reliable archive website in China: http://www.law-lib.com/law/law_view1.asp?id=547070.

grabbing in the name of Ecological Civilization which began in 2012 has been dispossessing Kazakh land at an intensity that had never previously been seen. Before 1949, grassland ownership in Altay Prefecture was mainly decided by the Kazakh leaders (*Bas* in Kazakh) of tribes (*Awil* in Kazakh), a traditional Kazakh social unit normally based on kinship (Zhang, 2004). At the beginning of the CCP's rule in Altay Prefecture in 1949, Chinese authorities did not immediately overturn the land system based on Kazakh tribes as they did in Han rural regions; on the contrary, in August 1952, the Central Party Committee Xinjiang Division recognized nomadism as “essentially different from feudal landlord economy” and its need to be protected (Zhang, 2004). This might be attributed to the CCP's relative lack of legitimate base and knowledge in Xinjiang at the time (McMillen, 1984).

As a result, between 1952 and 1959, the Altay authorities established Pastoral–Agricultural Cooperatives and Public–Private Partnership Pastures, which partially preserved the *Awil* system and only absorbed part of Kazakh herders in the whole prefecture. In 1959, Altay authorities began to transform the Cooperatives and Public-Private Partnership Pastures into People's Communes, which marked the beginning of the Kazakh land dispossession. Though the communes confiscated the grassland and cattle previously belonging to the herders, Kazakhs largely preserved their nomadic lifestyle by herding for the communes, and after the collective retention, the production of their work was distributed to each household according to their work records (Zhang, 2004).

In 1978, the CCP began to abandon the communes and adopt a market approach for China's economic development, which then changed the party's previous views on nomadism in Xinjiang. In 1986, the Xinjiang Party Committee held a meeting in Altay City, which came up with “five transformations” in nomadism: from nomadism to sedentarism/semi-sedentarism; from husbandry dependent on the weather and extensive management to scientific husbandry and management; from the natural economy of self-sufficient production to large-scale commercial

production; from traditional husbandry to modern husbandry (Zhang, 2004). In the meeting, the Xinjiang authorities no longer favored nomadism, the indigenous production mode based on the local need.

Employing a more market-oriented and science-based view instead, Xinjiang authorities began to explore potential routes for the more efficient use of land and more productive modes of meat production to replace indigenous nomadism that they considered “backward.” Nevertheless, the Xinjiang authorities did not discover the specific path to achieve the transformations for nomadism at the time. As a result, since then, Altay authorities began to rent the grassland to Kazakh nomads based on two systems: Grassland Usage Permission and Pasture Paid Contract. Between 1988 and 1990, Chinese authorities gave 17,105 Kazakh households Grassland Usage Permissions; from 1994 to 1995, 16,813 Kazakh nomads signed Pasture Paid Contracts with the government (Zhang, 2004). Though the land in Altay Prefecture belongs to socialist property *de jure* since 1959, through the two systems, Kazakh nomads regained land use rights and largely preserved their nomadic lifestyle. Nevertheless, Kazakh nomads have been facing defrauded systems, degraded grassland, and a surge in living costs, which have driven many Kazakhs to return to Kazakhstan through the Oralman program (Cerny, 2010).

Though, Kazakh land has been confiscated *de jure* by the CCP into the Chinese socialist property since 1959, Kazakh nomads could still preserve some autonomy and use the land—at least partially—in their own ways before the 2010s through cooperatives, communes, permissions, and contracts. Since 2013, however, Altay authorities have been intensively grabbing land from Kazakh nomads and achieving primitive accumulation in the name of Ecological Civilization through the demarcation of basic grassland; herding prohibitions, halts, and rotations; advanced technologies; and security forces.

The recent massive land grabbing against nomads started in June 2011 when the State Council of

the PRC placed Instructions on How to Develop Pastoral Areas Fast and Well. The instructions put ecology in the first place and required local governments to protect grassland by restraining herding activities.³² The instructions introduce the key concept of basic grassland, the grassland that is considered important and thus enclosed by the governments, which has been central in the land grabbing against nomads in China. According to the People's Republic of China Grassland Law enacted in 2002, the basic grassland includes important pastures, grassland for forages, artificial grassland for husbandry production, recovered grassland from farmland, refined grassland, grass seeds bases, grassland with ecological functions, grassland for protected animals and plants, grassland for sciences/education/experiments, and other grassland the State Council considers as basic grassland.³³ The instructions required the local government to demarcate basic grassland, which should comprise more than 80 percent of the total grassland. Furthermore, the basic grassland should be strictly protected, and herding activities should be restrained by prohibitions, halts, and rotations. Hence, in most cases, the grassland essential to nomads falls into the category of basic grassland, and local governments can enclose any grassland in the name of basic grassland protection under this broad definition that gives governments the power to interpret.

In September 2012, the Xinjiang authorities began to adopt the instructions by requiring local governments to precisely demarcate basic grassland and renew Pasture Paid Contracts with nomads through advanced technologies (e.g., GPS, satellite imaging, and digital management).³⁴ In March 2013, Altay authorities announced the Altay Prefecture Ecological Environmental Protection Regulations, which require governments to enhance the protection of basic grassland by controlling herding times, intensity, and livestock numbers and actively implement herding prohibitions, halts, and rotations.³⁵ The scale of herding prohibitions in Altay Prefecture is often

32 See http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2011-08/09/content_2821.htm.

33 See https://www.mee.gov.cn/ywgz/fgbz/fl/200212/t20021228_81958.shtml.

34 The original link was deleted by the Xinjiang authorities. A secondary link is attached: <http://law.foodmate.net/show-175732.html>.

35 See <http://www.npcxj.com/index.php/Lew/info/type1/difangxingfaguiguizhang/id/30059.html>.

tremendous. For example, in 2021, 57 percent of grassland and forest in Altay City was enclosed in the name of ecological protection.³⁶ In July 2018, the Altay Administrative Office announced Management Measures on Herding Prohibitions and Grass–Livestock Balance Supervision in Altay Prefecture, which specifically targets herding activities.³⁷ The measures required the county and village governments to collect all nomads’ information, supervise herding activities, and punish the violators. The county and village governments are also required to set up Grass Protectors who can patrol the grassland, stop “illegal activities,” and report to the governments.

In order to dispossess the land, Altay authorities have been targeting Kazakh nomads in the name of basic grassland protection through a combination of technologies, regulations, administrations, and security forces. In the process of land dispossession, Altay authorities have used advanced technologies to precisely manage grassland and track nomads. For example, basic grassland is demarcated by the Chinese authorities through GPS and satellite imaging, and the data is managed through digital platforms.³⁸ Moreover, in 2022, more than 90 percent of Kazakh nomads in remote regions had access to 4G internet services provided by China Mobile Altay Branch, and the nomads are recommended to use Chinese GPS services by inserting GPS chips into their sheep.³⁹ Through internet and GPS services, Chinese authorities can easily obtain the precise location of each nomad in time and send security forces to expel, fine, and arrest those who step into the enclosed land. As a result, Chinese authorities can not only dispossess massive land in Altay Prefecture in the name of basic grassland protection but also secure the dispossession through high-tech violence.

The land dispossession in the name of Ecological Civilization echoes the conservation projects in “green grabbing” all over the world in the past decades, which justify land dispossession through environmental agendas (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012; Holmes, 2014; Rocheleau, 2015;

36 See http://www.ce.cn/cysc/stwm/zxdt/202111/09/t20211109_37071434.shtml.

37 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/govxxgk/DD001/2018-08-01/0e3a328c-5446-4d21-b7e7-3a88e421f699.html>.

38 See <http://law.foodmate.net/show-175732.html>.

39 See https://www.ts.cn/zxpd/xy/202211/t20221110_9973819.shtml.

Scheidel & Work, 2018). The land grabbing in Altay Prefecture can be considered a type of green grabbing since it is justified by ecological protection; however, green grabbing in Altay Prefecture is unique in terms of the involved actors, the high-tech feature, and the degree of violence. For example, in Tanzania and Chile, green grabbing involves some powerful international actors, such as conservation organizations and global investors (Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012; Holmes, 2014). In Altay Prefecture, however, Chinese authorities, as the only major actor in land grabbing, conduct the whole process of land dispossession through high-tech administration and violence against Kazakh nomads.

Land dispossession against Kazakh nomads also reflects an embedded racist attitude against nomads in the Chinese state. In Altay Prefecture, while the majority of Kazakh nomads have been dispossessed, the farmland owned by Han Chinese has been strictly protected since 2011. In 2011, Altay authorities implemented a four-layered farmland protection system (from farmers to the governments) to protect the farmland of 99,400 hectares in the region.⁴⁰ In 2013, the Farmland Protection Examination Group from the Department of Land and Resources in Xinjiang visited Altay Prefecture and required Altay authorities to further strengthen farmland protection systems and the reclamation of arable land.⁴¹ In 2018, the Natural Resources Bureau in Altay Prefecture announced Land Use Plan in Altay Prefecture 2018, which required governments to implement the “strictest farmland protection systems” and “ecological protection systems.”⁴² In 2019, Altay authorities enacted measures to assess the performance of city and county governments in terms of farmland protection.⁴³ Moreover, dispossessed farmers can receive an ecological compensation ten times more than nomads do, and farmers can receive subsidies for certain types of crops while nomads have no subsidies for their livestock.⁴⁴

40 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003004/20180620/21542d98-f290-4803-bd62-f54f3c70a8c8.html>.

41 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/707b39f9-12f3-4c09-9dac-633ec76ca74a.html>.

42 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/govxxgk/DD008/2018-10-30/2a222a4c-89d7-4f05-9c0f-bb3b895603eb.html>.

43 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/govxxgk/DD001/2019-04-17/5cc3f01a-971a-4c9c-8bf3-3b68725c8e46.html>.

44 See 2021 Jeminy County Rural Subsidies List: <https://m.nongjiao.com/news/read-23281.html>.

The discrepant land policies reflect that the land grabbing in Altay Prefecture mainly targets Kazakh identity and nomadic culture. Jenes Hades, the Commissioner of Altay Prefecture Administration and de jure governor of the region, is an ethnic Kazakh, but he has no de facto power. Zhang Yan, a Han Chinese who is the party secretary of Altay Prefecture, has the de facto power to control the whole prefecture. Similar structures exist in almost all levels of the government in Altay Prefecture. While ethnic minorities, in most cases Kazakhs, are assigned as de jure leaders, their Han Chinese counterparts in the party branches exert the de facto power. Such a Han-dominated political structure can easily generate racist policies against ethnic Kazakhs.

The systemic corruption has further worsened the situation of dispossessed Kazakhs in Altay Prefecture since land compensations are sometimes embezzled by some Chinese officials. According to Altay authorities, during the grassland protection, affected Kazakh herders can receive compensation. For example, in 2021, a nomad in Jeminay County affected by the ecological policies can receive compensation between 6 and 50 Chinese dollars per acre per year.⁴⁵ It is dubious, however, that how many nomads can really receive such compensation. For example, between 2011 and 2014, Kazakh nomads in Karajon grassland, located in Tekes County in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, protested against the local government for land grabbing and embezzlement, resulting in the detention of more than 10 nomads.⁴⁶ Moreover, since 2017, facilitated by the crackdown on Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, Chinese authorities have used extrajudicial camps to detain Kazakh activists and nomads who fight for land rights and compensation. For example, in 2017, Zhanargul Zhumatai, a Kazakh human rights activist who once helped dispossessed Kazakh herders whose compensations were embezzled by corrupt officials, was detained in a re-education camp in Urumqi for two years.⁴⁷

45 See <https://m.nongjiao.com/news/read-23281.html>.

46 See the YouTube video, which contains the Chinese official report, Kazakh riot scenes and interviews, and legal documents: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5ALhghmGno>.

47 See the report by DW Chinese:

<https://www.dw.com/zh/%E5%86%8D%E6%95%99%E8%82%B2%E7%87%9F%E7%8D%B2%E9%87%8B%E5%BE%8C%E5%8F%88%E9%81%AD%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E6%94%BF%E5%BA%9C%E5%A8%81%E8%84%85-%E5%93%88%>

Land grabbing in Altay Prefecture since the 2010s can be seen as a process of primitive capital accumulation since it has separated Kazakh nomads from their means of production (grassland). As a result, dispossessed Kazakhs, the land, and resources can be articulated into the Chinese market process for further accumulation. Though the land in Altay Prefecture was confiscated into Chinese socialist property as early as 1959, the majority of Kazakh nomads could still maintain their lifestyle until 2013 when the biggest land dispossession campaign in the history of Altay Prefecture began. Guided by Ecological Civilization, Altay authorities have intensely dispossessed the land from Kazakh nomads in the name of basic grassland protection. As a result, primitive accumulation has been achieved through the separation of Kazakh nomads and their land, which then lays a foundation for the further dispossession and capital accumulation in three industries (husbandry, agriculture, and tourism) built upon Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities.

4.3 High-Standard Nomad Sedentarization Projects (Chi. 高标准牧民定居工程)

In order to further articulate Kazakhs into the Chinese economy, Chinese authorities need to first sedentarize Kazakh nomads in order to better manage them. In the land grabbing justified by Ecological Civilization, many Kazakh nomads have become landless and then been managed by Chinese authorities through well-designed High-Standard Nomad Sedentarization Projects since 2009. It is also possible that the sedentarization projects have facilitated land dispossession against Kazakh nomads since landless Kazakhs are provided with places to live.

Sedentarization projects in Xinjiang can be traced back to 1986 when the Xinjiang Party Committee held a meeting in Altay City. The meeting came up with “five transformations” in nomadism which included sedentarization (Zhang, 2004). Since then, Altay authorities have

E8%96%A9%E5%85%8B%E5%A5%B3%E6%B1%82%E6%8F%B4/a-64334219.

begun to implement sedentarization projects across the region. According to the report from Altay Prefecture Administration in 2018, between 1986 and 2008, authorities sedentarized 3,221 Kazakh households in Altay Prefecture. Nevertheless, before 2009, sedentarization projects were small in scale, were isolated from the corresponding services (e.g., transportation, schools, and medical services), and lacked plans for further integration of sedentarized Kazakhs into the Chinese economy.

Since 2009, however, Altay authorities began to adopt High-Standard Nomad Sedentarization Projects designed and financed by the Chinese central authorities, which have been conducted on a large scale with corresponding services and clear post-sedentarization plans that have never previously been seen. High-Standard Nomad Sedentarization Projects are based on successful experiences from a sedentarization experiment with Tibetan nomads between 2001 and 2008. During the experiment, the Chinese authorities found an effective mode to sedentarize nomads and then promoted it across the whole country with special funds starting in 2008.⁴⁸ Instructed and financed by the Xinjiang and Chinese central governments, the Altay governments started high-standard sedentarization projects in 2009. As a result, between 2009 and 2014, 21,528 Kazakh households were sedentarized in Altay Prefecture.⁴⁹ During the Thirteen Five-Year Plan (between 2016 and 2019), 6,609 Kazakh households were sedentarized.⁵⁰ According to the Regional Economy and Social Development Statistical Communiqué of Altay Prefecture in 2019, 31,618 Kazakh nomadic households were sedentarized by the end of 2019, which comprise 90.6 percent of nomadic Kazakh households registered in 2008.⁵¹

Though the funding for sedentarization projects in Altay comes primarily from Chinese authorities—central government, the Xinjiang government, Counterparts Xinjiang Aid provinces

48 See <https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fzggw/jgsj/njs/sjdt/201209/P020191101560683799534.pdf>.

49 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/b4941efe-fb02-44a9-82ce-34bfc74161ce.html>.

50 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/govxxgk/DD013/2018-11-29/e183303d-f6a7-4831-996b-283ce0e402a7.html>.

51 See <https://web.archive.org/save/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/sjalt/020005/20220512/3bba4bc2-2523-4506-baca-375215967a3b.html>.

(Jilin and Heilongjiang Provinces), and the local governments—Kazakh nomads still need to partially finance the houses by themselves. For example, between 2009 and 2014, the governments provided 1.566 billion Chinese dollars while nomads spent 439 million Chinese dollars.⁵² Nevertheless, some nomads do not have enough money to self-finance this portion, which comprises nearly one-fourth of the total spending for their houses. As an Altay official sedentarization report in 2018 shows, some nomads transferred their quotas to others because of the lack of money, and governments advised to afford loans for those nomads who cannot afford the houses.⁵³

The sedentarization projects in Altay Prefecture follow three principles. First, before nomad sedentarization, governments must provide water, land, and forage for nomads' livestock.⁵⁴ Hence, the locations of herder sedentarization were chosen by governments in places near water and farmland where forage and fodder can be grown. Second, the sedentarization locations must meet the requirements set by the Xinjiang authorities, which are Three Accesses (water, road, and electricity), Four Haves (house, pasture, forage land, and forest belt), and Five Accessories (school, medical centre, shopping store, technique services, and Chinese cultural station).⁵⁵ Third, the sedentarization projects must let nomads move in the locations, get accustomed to the sedentary houses, and be prosperous, and the projects must be eco-friendly.⁵⁶ These three principles have largely addressed the problems in sedentarization projects before 2008. The old sedentarization mode did not provide enough resources and services for the sedentarized nomads, thus leading to the return to the nomadic lifestyle for some of the sedentarized Kazakhs. In the new mode, however, Kazakh nomads have been not only sedentarized through housing projects but also articulated into Chinese society economically, socially, and culturally after sedentarization.

52 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/128ce685-9953-4fc9-b1fe-e8b205981293.html>.

53 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/govxxgk/DD013/2018-11-29/e183303d-f6a7-4831-996b-283ce0e402a7.html>.

54 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003004/20180620/69f083e0-13b0-43c0-8058-038e7a5c46d5.html>.

55 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/e3625d6c-1c38-4ef3-ade4-93f44e61ac7f.html>.

56 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/7a28847d-cebd-481a-84e0-24e78af871cd.html>.

In Altay Prefecture, four types of sedentarization projects have been applied in the past decade. The first one, also the most frequently applied, is called “concentration sedentarization” (Chi. 集中定居). In concentration sedentarization, Altay authorities choose a location, normally a large area of plain nearby the urban regions, roads, and water, and then hire some construction companies to build houses, schools, transportation, and other facilities for sedentarized Kazakhs.⁵⁷ As a result, a whole Kazakh sedentarization village is built from scratch. The second type is called “transplant sedentarization” (Chi. 插花定居), which resettles some nomads in long-established villages. The third one is called “border-defense sedentarization” (Chi. 守边定居), which settles the nomads nearby the national borders as border guardians, but this is rarely used. The last one is called “urban sedentarization” (Chi. 进城定居), which directly settles nomads in modern apartments built in urban regions.

Though the high-standard sedentarization mode seems well-designed and comprehensive, it might display some serious problems in practice due to systemic corruption. According to two court verdicts in Altay Prefecture, the construction companies who contract with local governments for building the sedentarization projects sometimes subcontract other unqualified workers.⁵⁸ In the verdicts, some rural construction workers sued the companies and governments for not paying the subcontractors, which implies potential embezzlement. Moreover, in the verdicts, the construction workers do not have building qualifications, and Altay City People’s Court adjudicated the subcontracts as invalid, thus only letting the companies pay part of the

57 See Altay Prefecture Public Resources Trade Website. The website publishes detailed bid information on several sedentarization projects: <http://xjaltggy.gov.cn/TPFront/>.

58 In two verdicts, several workers sued the construction companies, Herder Sedentarization Office, and other related governmental organs for failing to pay the money in the contracts. See <https://aiqicha.baidu.com/wenshu?wenshuId=c09116abd1dc253f9ea89672945b961b065b0c39> and <https://aiqicha.baidu.com/wenshu?wenshuId=fc08a662ea99acb6388f10603e7aef9cc86a5252>.

project money to the workers. Because of the embezzlement, the houses for sedentarized Kazakhs are likely to be ill-quality since they were built by unqualified workers using cheap materials.

Though there are potential quality problems stemming from embezzlement, the high-standard sedentarization projects have successfully sedentarized more than 90 percent of nomads in Altay Prefecture. The projects have not only facilitated primitive accumulation by providing shelters for dispossessed Kazakh nomads but also laid a foundation for the further articulation of Kazakhs into the Chinese economy through husbandry, agriculture, and tourism.

4.4 Modern Chinese Industries in Altay Prefecture: Dispossession and Capital Accumulation through the Kazakh Project

Through land grabbing and sedentarization projects, the majority of Kazakh nomads have been separated from their land and sedentarized and have become politically, economically, and culturally manageable. In order to continue dispossessing Kazakhs and accumulating capital, Chinese authorities articulate Kazakh land, identity, culture, and social reproductive activities into the Chinese market process through industries in the name of poverty alleviation. In this study, I choose to analyze three industries—husbandry, agriculture, and tourism—to show how the Chinese state has achieved this goal. The three industries are closely related to Kazakhs and have generated massive so-called rural surplus labor power that is then articulated into other sectors by the Chinese state.

4.4.1 Chinese Husbandry: Building Upon Kazakh Nomadic Traditions

The development of husbandry in Altay Prefecture since 2009 has been gradually accumulating capital through the replacement, commodification, and alienation of Kazakh culture, the

separation of Kazakhs' productive and social reproductive activities, the exploitation of Kazakh identity, and the articulation of local husbandry into the Chinese national and international economy. In the process of capital accumulation in husbandry, Kazakh land is further dispossessed, and Kazakh culture and identity are commodified and exploited.

Husbandry, as the largest primary industry in Altay Prefecture, according to the Statistical Communiqué of 2021, has been built upon the livestock-feeding tradition of the Kazakhs in the region. Altay Prefecture is home to massive grassland, optimal species, and skilled Kazakh nomads, which are favorable conditions to develop modern husbandry industries. For example, Altay sheep, a species of sheep cultivated by the local nomads for centuries, can survive at extreme cold or hot temperatures, and its meat is tasty but not gamy. In Altay Prefecture, though both Kazakh nomadism and modern husbandry are related to livestock feeding, they are different in terms of the relationship between Kazakhs and the Chinese economy. In nomadism, Kazakh nomads can, to some degree, live in a self-sufficient economy outside of the Chinese market process. For example, with land usage permission, Kazakhs can preserve their nomadic lifestyle in state-owned pastures, and they can also decide how many cattle and sheep to feed and where to sell. Before 2009, Kazakh nomads fed themselves with their own livestock, received medical treatments from doctors in the tribes, educated their children in the yurts, and had limited exchanges with the broader Chinese economy. Nevertheless, in husbandry industries, Kazakh land, identity, and culture are gradually articulated into the Chinese economy in three stages.

The development of modern husbandry in Altay Prefecture can be roughly divided into three stages. From the first stage to the third, the productive and social reproductive activities of Kazakhs are gradually separated; Kazakh nomadic culture is gradually replaced, commodified, and alienated; Kazakh identity is exploited; and the livestock-feeding activities of Kazakhs are gradually articulated into the Chinese market process. In the first stage (2009–2014), Altay authorities focused on the sedentarization of not only Kazakhs but also their livestock. As a

result, primitive husbandry was developed in sedentarization locations, which can be seen as a continuation of Kazakh livestock-feeding activities without mobility. In the second stage (2014–present), Altay authorities began to support Kazakh nomads through three modes—Family Pastures, Standardized Husbandry Communities, and Husbandry Cooperatives—to develop local husbandry industries. In the third stage (2019–present), the Altay authorities introduce Chinese enterprises to develop more “advanced” modes of husbandry and integrate local husbandry industries into the broader Chinese economy at a national and international level. In the second and third stages, the majority of Kazakhs have been excluded from the industries, thus becoming so-called rural surplus labor power, a new “problem” that needs to be managed by the Chinese state in other ways.

The first stage started at the same time as the high-standard sedentarization projects in 2009. In this stage, Altay authorities sedentarized the livestock of Kazakh nomads by following the guidance of Xinjiang authorities: settling the livestock down before sedentarization, cultivating forage before the livestock settlement, providing land before the forage cultivation, and providing water before the land provision.⁵⁹ Based on this guidance, many sedentarization locations are near water, grassland, and farmland where the forage for the livestock can be cultivated.⁶⁰ In some sedentarization locations, Altay authorities developed grassland and irrigation reservoirs for Kazakh herders. For example, in 2009, Altay authorities developed 3,800 acres of forage land for a sedentarization location in Qinggil for 60 sedentarized Kazakh households.⁶¹ In 2011, Altay authorities built two irrigation reservoirs for sedentarized Kazakhs, one in Qinggil and another in Burultogay, which provided water for the livestock and forage cultivation.⁶² At the early stage, the primitive development of modern husbandry accommodated

59 See http://paper.ce.cn/jjrb/html/2008-11/04/content_35624.htm.

60 See http://xj.cnr.cn/gd/200908/t20090811_505427354.html.

61 See

<https://web.archive.org/web/2022111215738/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/f4870713-7e77-4e4f-831f-5bf6ba22df6b.html>.

62 See https://web.archive.org/web/2022111220136/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2011-12/01/content_2007593.htm.

the sedentarization projects in which the priority of Altay authorities was to anchor Kazakh herders in fixed, manageable locations.

In the first stage, Kazakhs gradually lost part of their nomadic culture. In nomadic practice, Kazakhs do not need to grow the forage for their livestock; instead, they seek unfrozen grassland through seasonal migration. Nomadic Kazakhs are good at predicting weather conditions based on observations, which helps them decide the timing of migration.⁶³ In husbandry, however, such knowledge has been obsolete and replaced by new knowledge of how to use irrigation systems and cultivate crops. Moreover, the Kazakh livestock-feeding activities began to be articulated into the Chinese market process since the Kazakhs need to buy seeds from the local Chinese market. As a result, the primitive development of husbandry has laid a foundation for husbandry at the second stage that further replaces and alienates Kazakhs from their culture, further integrates Kazakh productive activities into the Chinese market process, and, more importantly, begins to separate Kazakhs' productive and social reproductive activities.

The second stage of husbandry development began in 2014. Though the sedentarization projects still continued, nearly half of Kazakh nomads were securely sedentarized in 2014. In order to further improve productivity, Altay authorities encourage sedentarized Kazakhs to develop more intensive husbandry modes. With the support of governments, three major modes of modern husbandry have been developed across rural regions: Family Pasture (Chi. 家庭牧场), Standardized Husbandry Community (Chi. 标准化养殖小区), and Husbandry Cooperative (Chi. 养殖合作社). These modes are more intensive and competitive compared with the primitive mode, adopt more “advanced” technologies, and involve financial loans, which lead to further Kazakh cultural alienation, dispossession, and the separation between productive and social reproductive activities.

63 See https://www.cma.gov.cn/kppd/kppdrt/201312/t20131203_233043.html.

Family Pasture is a modern husbandry production mode in which Kazakhs adopt “advanced” husbandry techniques to run a large-sized farm. For example, in this mode, Kazakhs are required to build sheepfolds and cattle folds with heating functions, optimize the species of the cattle and sheep, grow silage, and expand the production scale.⁶⁴ The second mode, Standardized Husbandry Community, differs from the Family Pasture mode in which Kazakhs need to design and build modern facilities and is designed and built by local governments with all the necessary modern facilities for husbandry. In 2014, Altay authorities invested 104.95 million Chinese dollars to build 66 Standardized Husbandry Communities, and each of them is equipped with standardized cattle folds of more than 1,000 square meters, silage cellars, fences, veterinary rooms, and sanitizing rooms.⁶⁵ Lastly, Husbandry Cooperatives are corporation-like organizations that are shared by several herders. By forming Cooperatives, herders can combine their resources (e.g., money and livestock) and create more intensive and larger husbandry farms than most individual herders have. In 2012, five sedentarized Kazakh households in Burqin County established a Husbandry Cooperative that aims to fatten sheep.⁶⁶

The adoption of “advanced” technologies is key to all three husbandry modes. Each of the three modes normally build modern husbandry facilities, such as sheep and cattle folds, silage cellars, and independent veterinary rooms. These modern facilities require Kazakh herders to learn new husbandry knowledge and change their previous ways of feeding livestock. Altay authorities have also been organizing technique training for Kazakh herders to learn new husbandry knowledge. For instance, in 2015, Chemurchek, a Kazakh village near Altay City, began to organize Kazakh villagers to observe how Family Pasture works.⁶⁷ In 2021, Altay authorities

64 See the report by Altay News Agency: https://archive.org/details/20221112_20221112_0329.

The original source: <http://www.altxw.com/news/system/2019/04/06/030032068.shtml>.

65 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/0afd58ff-b60b-44c5-a1bd-c4d405035195.html>.

66 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003004/20180620/69f083e0-13b0-43c0-8058-038e7a5c46d5.html>.

67 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/8047af5a-29bb-4fce-be3a-db216c414d75.html>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221112032701/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/8047af5a-29bb-4fce-be3a-db216c414d75.html>.

invested 200,000 Chinese dollars to organize 120 group training sessions with 5,000 learning materials distributed across the entire prefecture.⁶⁸ As a result, the use of modern husbandry facilities and knowledge further replaced Kazakh nomadic livestock-feeding culture.

Moreover, in the case of feeding Altay sheep, Kazakh herders preserve their pre-existing knowledge and experiences but utilize them in a very different way from the past. In the nomadic lifestyle, Kazakhs use the knowledge to raise sheep in order to feed themselves; however, in modern husbandry modes, Kazakh herders use the same knowledge combined with modern technologies to improve meat quality and productivity since they need money to afford technique equipment and services as well as their living costs. The integration of Kazakh productive activities into the Chinese market process has alienated Kazakhs from their culture since the livestock-feeding culture has been commodified and lost its traditional meaning to the Kazakhs.

Aside from the use of technologies, the three modes of husbandry production also involve loans and limited financial support. The loans have helped the rural credit cooperatives accumulate capital while the limited financial support from the governments has ignited the competition among Kazakh herders for quotas, which further dispossesses many Kazakhs. At the second stage of husbandry development, rural credit cooperatives have provided Kazakhs with loans, which have achieved capital accumulation through interest rates. In 2016, for each rural poor household, the Altay Rural Credit Cooperative provided guarantee-free loans under 50,000 Chinese dollars within three years with an untold interest rate.⁶⁹ Moreover, Altay authorities have provided financial support to a small number of Kazakh households. In 2016, the government in Kaba County financed 10 households to build Family Pastures, providing 120 thousand Chinese dollars to each household at once.⁷⁰ In 2014, Altay authorities invested 104.95

68 Download from here: https://archive.org/details/20221112_20221112_0346.

The original source: <http://www.altxw.com/news/system/2022/03/09/030112075.shtml>.

69 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/ae3e920f-99de-4a7f-8043-92d3970f56e3.html>.

70 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/5d971721-22ea-453d-8668-6129658f1695.html>.

million Chinese dollars to build 66 Standardized Husbandry Communities.⁷¹ As of 2020, the Kaba government had built 90 Standardized Husbandry Communities.⁷² Nevertheless, among more than 30,000 sedentarized Kazakh households, only a tiny fraction can receive financial support or move into Standardized Husbandry Communities.

The criteria for receiving financial support from the government are strict, and few Kazakh households can meet them. In 2021, though the Family Farms/Pastures, enlisted by Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department, can receive financial subsidies, technical support, and advertisement services, the criteria for enlistment are difficult to meet.⁷³ The applying pastures need to not only reach a certain scale (e.g., more than 20 heads of cattle or 100 sheep per year) but also have cattle folds, sheepfolds, calving rooms, silage pools, forage rooms, disinfection pools, and independent veterinary rooms (Li et al., 2008). Moreover, standards are in place for every facility in a Family Pasture requiring specific space, humidity, temperature, lighting, and ventilation. As a result, the majority of Kazakh households can not gain financial support from the government.

Moreover, in order to move into the Standardized Husbandry Communities which have limited quotas, Kazakh herders need to compete not only with other Kazakhs but also Han Chinese and Huis. Chinese authorities consider cattle and sheep husbandry as just one type of husbandry; other husbandry industries (e.g., chicken, pig, and fish) normally performed by Han Chinese are also important. Between 2008 and 2012, though the Altay authorities had developed 149 Standardized Husbandry Communities, the Communities were designed not only for cattle and sheep husbandry but also chicken and pig husbandry. As a result, many Han farmers were moved

71 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/0afd58ff-b60b-44c5-a1bd-c4d405035195.html>.

72 See <http://www.hbh.gov.cn/govvxxgk/001030/2020-11-20/22165abd-900f-450c-a222-dcf2bb270eba.html>.

73 See

<http://nynct.xinjiang.gov.cn/nynct/gsgg/202111/61830faa6e56497bb2e30b09e727e31c/files/%E5%85%B3%E4%BA%8E%E5%8D%B0%E5%8F%91%E3%80%8A%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E7%BB%B4%E5%90%BE%E5%B0%94%E8%87%AA%E6%B2%BB%E5%8C%BA%E5%AE%B6%E5%BA%AD%E5%86%9C%E5%9C%BA%E5%90%8D%E5%BD%95%E7%AE%A1%E7%90%86%E5%8A%9E%E6%B3%95%EF%BC%88%E8%AF%95%E8%A1%8C%EF%BC%89%E3%80%8B%E7%9A%84%E9%80%9A%E7%9F%A5.pdf>.

to the Communities.⁷⁴ Essentially, though Chinese authorities have provided various forms of support, only a small number of Kazakh households can actually receive them due to limited quotas, intensive competition, and high-standard requirements. Therefore, the land of many Kazakhs, assigned by sedentarization projects, is again dispossessed through land transfer, a system that allows herders and farmers to transfer their land use rights to other people. As Harvey (2004) argued, the process of capital accumulation always seeks to dispossess assets outside of the capitalist system. In the second stage, many sedentarized Kazakhs are dispossessed not because their production mode is still pre-capitalist but because the mode is “backward” in terms of technology and financialization.

At the second stage of husbandry development, the productive and social reproductive activities of Kazakhs begin to separate. In the three modes of husbandry, the production process is articulated into the Chinese economy through the local market. For example, some Standardized Husbandry Communities and Husbandry Cooperatives are built by Chinese construction companies.⁷⁵ Moreover, Kazakh households need to purchase, upgrade, and maintain equipment; sell livestock; and buy groceries. As a result, Kazakh productive activities have gradually been integrated into the Chinese economy and separated from social reproductive activities, which implies more potential burdens for Kazakh women at home. At the second stage of husbandry development in Altay Prefecture, many sedentarized Kazakhs are dispossessed and alienated from their nomadic traditions, and Kazakhs’ productive and social reproductive activities begin to separate, resulting in large numbers of waged Kazakh laborers, which has laid a foundation for the husbandry development at the third stage.

At the third stage of husbandry development, local husbandry in Altay Prefecture has been

74 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003004/20180620/94d53226-7fbf-4e1c-a9a7-b441ff388684.html> and <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/48252dd3-1a89-41f3-98fe-2ef06c353cbf.html>.

75 See two bid invitations for a Standardized Husbandry Community and a Husbandry Cooperative: <http://www.ggzy.gov.cn/information/html/b/650000/0101/202204/20/00650abf5431ddf846ecbf3bef5d339ffcf.shtml> and: <http://zj.jc85.com/zb/show-27958.html>.

articulated into the Chinese national and international economy, and waged Kazakh laborers generated at the second stage have been exploited in the Chinese husbandry industries, resulting in the further separation of Kazakhs' productive and social reproductive activities. As early as 2014, when Husbandry Cooperatives and Family Pastures were still growing, Altay authorities had already planned to introduce larger Chinese enterprises outside the region, which are able to further articulate local husbandry industries into the Chinese national and international economy. In 2014, Altay authorities subsidized camel husbandry cooperatives in Hongdun town to register a camel milk brand (Akebulake) in order to sell the products in the broader Chinese market.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, Altay authorities did not take the introduction of Chinese national and international enterprises seriously until the launch of the Anti-Poverty War in Xinjiang. In February 2016, Xi's Anti-Poverty War was adopted by Xinjiang authorities, who required local governments to alleviate poverty by introducing Chinese enterprise;, converging primary, secondary, and tertiary industries; and creating more job opportunities.⁷⁷ In order to respond to Xi's campaign, Altay authorities have been actively introducing Chinese national and international enterprises that can further articulate local husbandry into the Chinese economy and provide more job opportunities for rural Kazakhs who were dispossessed at the second stage.

Altay authorities have adopted two ways of introducing Chinese national and international enterprises in the region. First, the authorities directly introduced some Chinese national and international enterprises which have the most advanced husbandry-related technologies, advanced management modes, and national and international retailing channels into local husbandry industries. These Chinese enterprises then fund local enterprises that perform large-scale modern husbandry and processing, and the Chinese enterprises sell the products in the Chinese and global markets through their powerful logistics.

76 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/2ef3e0d8-3e30-4fc3-89a4-604484670f3e.html>.

77 See http://www.china.com.cn/lianghui/fangtan/2016-02/18/content_37818171.htm.

An example from the cattle industry helps to explain how these Chinese enterprises articulate local husbandry into the Chinese national and international economy. With the support from Altay authorities, Xinjiang Hualing Industry Commerce (Group) Corporation Limited (XHICCL) was introduced in Altay Prefecture to develop cattle industries in 640 Mesa, one of the largest Kazakh sedentarization locations with five concentration villages and 1,020 Kazakh households.⁷⁸ The XHICCL, established in Urumqi in 1988, owns the largest market in northwest China and businesses in Central Asia and eastern Europe, especially Georgia.⁷⁹ The XHICCL formally stepped into cattle husbandry in Altay Prefecture by financing Hualing Cattle Group Corporation Limited (HCGCL) in 2020 through a subsidiary, Hualing Agriculture Development Corporation Limited.⁸⁰ In 2021, the HCGCL financed Hualing Cattle Altay Corporation Limited (HCACL), which then built a large cattle husbandry industry named Ten-Thousand Cattle Park in 640 Mesa.⁸¹ With governmental support, the HCACL grabbed the Kazakh land in 640 Mesa through land transfer and built one of largest and most advanced cattle husbandry farms, named Ten-Thousand Cattle Park, in the region. In the industry, the HCACL introduced three high-quality cattle species (Simmental cattle, Angus cattle, and Xinjiang brown cattle) into the farm and built a comprehensive cattle husbandry system in which everything, from fodder planting to beef processing, is done in the farm.⁸² The farm is expected to feed 20,000 heads of cattle and bring 3,000 jobs for nearby herders and farmers.⁸³

In the case of Ten-Thousand Cattle Park, the Altay authorities introduced a well-developed Chinese enterprise directly into a Kazakh sedentarization location to build a very “advanced” cattle industry. In the industry, the sedentarized Kazakhs are not only dispossessed for the second time but also proletarianized into waged laborers to work for the industry. As a result, the

78 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/398101c7-1e50-4acd-8a4d-34fe99e1c42f.html>.

79 See <http://www.hualing.cn/page-10.html>.

80 See https://aiqicha.baidu.com/company_detail_32783586495923 and: <https://aiqicha.baidu.com/detail/compinfo?pid=xITM-TogKuTwt6i08jK0qIPgWVstSNS78Amd&rq=ef&pd=ee&from=ps>.

81 See https://aiqicha.baidu.com/company_detail_97896541985477 and: <http://xj.people.com.cn/n2/2021/0822/c394722-34878416.html>.

82 See <http://xj.people.com.cn/n2/2021/0822/c394722-34878416.html>.

83 See <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1697804228058419134&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

productive and social reproductive activities of Kazakhs are further separated. Moreover, through the national and international logistics of the Chinese enterprise, beef products produced by local Kazakh laborers are sold across the whole country and world. For example, in China's largest e-commerce platforms (e.g., Taobao and JD.com), Chinese customers can easily buy beef products from the XHICCL. Hence, the Chinese enterprise has articulated the local cattle industry in Altay Prefecture into the Chinese economy by exporting local products to the national and international markets.

The building of husbandry industries by the Chinese national and international enterprises also reflects a Chinese racial capitalist mode. In Altay Prefecture, the Chinese state has been accumulating capital through the exploitation of the Kazakh identity and region. First, in the Chinese livestock industry chain, Altay Prefecture, a Kazakh region, has become a low-end producer and processor of livestock products while the Han-dominated regions are the high-end consumers. As a result, the latest husbandry mode created by Chinese enterprises has produced a capitalist mode based on ethnic exploitations in which ethnic minority regions produce value for Han consumption as well as capital accumulation. Second, the husbandry industries in Altay Prefecture display a clear ethnic hierarchy and segregation in which Han Chinese work as white-collar managers with high wages while Kazakhs are hired as livestock feeders and carers with low wages. All the Chinese enterprises are owned by Han Chinese, including even those founded by locals. For example, Qinggil County Mengyuan Biological Technology Cooperation Limited, which was promoted as a Xinjiang-level emphasized leading enterprise in 2020, is owned by Yu Zhicheng, a Han Chinese who was a farmer in Qinggil County. The majority of Kazakhs, except a small number who own Family Pastures or Husbandry Cooperatives, either work at the bottom of the husbandry industries or become rural surplus labor power. Moreover, in the husbandry industries, Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities are openly excluded from certain types of positions. For instance, in an online job posting by Xinjiang Wangyuan Biological Technology Group Corporation Limited, all the open positions openly required that applicants be ethnic Han

Chinese.⁸⁴ As a result, in the latest mode of husbandry industries in Altay Prefecture, the majority of Kazakhs are either excluded or concentrated in low-wage occupations and are exploited by Chinese enterprises for capital accumulation based on their ethnic identity.

In the latest development of husbandry in Altay Prefecture, apart from the exploitation of Kazakh identity and the improvement of productivity through more “advanced” capitalist modes, Chinese enterprises have also achieved capital accumulation through the redistribution of the existing surpluses. Redistributive dispossession, defined by Bin (2016), is an appropriation of surpluses through privatization, financialization, management of crises, and state redistributions, and it does not directly generate surpluses. In Altay Prefecture, those Chinese enterprises are introduced and backed by local governments to take over previous local husbandry industries. For example, the Rural Credit Cooperative in Burultogay lent 200 million Chinese dollars to the Xinjiang Wangyuan Biological Technology Group Corporation Limited, a Chinese international enterprise, to build the camel industry in the region.⁸⁵ Through privatization and financialization backed by the government, Chinese enterprises have grabbed surpluses previously produced by Kazakh herders.

During the development of husbandry in Altay Prefecture since 2009, the Chinese state has been “upgrading” the capitalist modes and gradually articulating the local husbandry production into the Chinese national and international markets. As a result, sedentarized Kazakhs have been further dispossessed, excluded, and exploited based on their identity and culture in Chinese racial capitalism. In this section, I analyzed how the Chinese state, in the husbandry industries, has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation through the management of Kazakh land, livestock-feeding culture, identity, and production-reproduction relations. In the next section, I focus on how the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation in agriculture through Kazakh cultural replacement and genocide.

84 See https://archive.org/details/20221116_20221116_2002.

85 See <http://www.altxw.com/news/system/2022/05/15/030116056.shtml>.

4.4.2 Chinese Agriculture: Replacing Kazakh Pastoralism

In Altay Prefecture, different from husbandry which is partially built upon Kazakh livestock-feeding traditions and complements the agriculture-focused Chinese economy, the development of agriculture in the region can be seen as an example of Chinese agricultural expansion into nomadic region which seeks to totally replace Kazakh pastoralism and meat-based diets with Chinese agriculturalism, gardenism, and vegetarianism. Therefore, the development of agriculture in Altay Prefecture is a transformation of Kazakh pastures into Chinese agricultural industries, which further separates the productive and social reproductive activities of the Kazakhs through land dispossession and Kazakh proletarianization, eliminates Kazakh culture in both production and reproduction spaces, and assimilates the region into the Chinese state dietarily and culturally through the articulation of the rural–urban economy at a local level. I use three cases from my fieldwork to analyze how the Chinese state has achieved cultural genocide against Kazakh pastoralism and diet culture in Altay Prefecture.

The development of agriculture in the Altay region, a traditionally nomadic region for centuries, only began after the establishment of the PRC. Before 1949, Altai Mountain Region (Altay Prefecture) was dominated by Kazakh nomadism, and only a small group of Kazakhs, Russians, Uyghurs, Huis, and Han immigrants practiced primitive agricultural activities (Zhang, 2004). According to the latest Statistical Communiqué of Altay Prefecture in 2021, however, the total output value of agriculture is approximately 4.97 billion Chinese dollars, which comprises 37.6 percent of the total output value of the primary industry, representing a 17 percent increase from 2020. Meanwhile, the largest primary industry, husbandry, was valued at 6.94 billion Chinese dollars in 2021, just a 3.5 percent increase from 2020.⁸⁶ It is evident that Chinese authorities

⁸⁶ See Statistical Communiqué of Altay Prefecture in 2021: <https://web.archive.org/web/20221105005422/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/sjalt/020005/20220616/2f4a0226-88bb-4cfa-b643-d1655a28d250.html>.

have invested much effort to develop agriculture in Altay Prefecture after 1949.

In Altay Prefecture, the earliest development of agriculture was closely related to the XPCC and the earliest sedentarized Kazakhs. In 1953, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Xinjiang Division Agriculture Construction Tenth Division was established based on the Chinese People's Liberation Army 22nd Corps Cavalry Seventh Division in Altay Prefecture, which then joined the XPCC in 1955.⁸⁷ During the early development of agriculture in Altay Prefecture, the Tenth Division not only reclaimed some wasteland and developed agriculture by itself but also sent Han settlers to public-private cooperation pastures along with the earliest sedentarized Kazakhs. The Han settlers then developed agriculture in the pastures.

An example to demonstrate how the Chinese state has successfully replaced Kazakh pastoralism with Chinese agricultural traditions is First Pasture near Altay City, a village in which I completed fieldwork several times in 2020. First Pasture was founded by Altay authorities and some sedentarized Kazakhs in 1956 (Zhang, 2004). As the first established public-private cooperation pasture in Altay Prefecture, First Pasture was set to develop collective husbandry and transform Kazakh nomadism into a socialist pastoral economy. However, during the 1960s, the Tenth Division sent Han settlers to work for Xinjiang Altay Prefecture Construction Engineering Head Office (XAPCEHO), which then developed agriculture in First Pasture. As workers under the XAPCEHO, those Han settlers built rural housing projects and developed agriculture.

After decades of agricultural development in the village, the previous Kazakh pastoral space has been largely encroached upon and replaced by Han agricultural practices in First Pasture. When I visited First Pasture in October 2020, I was surprised that I could hardly find any pastures there, contrary to what the name implies. The whole place was composed of agricultural farmland and

⁸⁷ See the introduction of the Tenth Division in Beitun: <http://www.bts.gov.cn/c/2022-03-17/2791584.shtml>.

rural houses. I specifically searched for pastures in the village but only found pasture-like land with saline-alkali soils difficult for crop growth at the periphery of the village, where some cattle and sheep were grazing. During my fieldwork in First Pasture, local Han and Kazakh farmers had just finished the crop harvest. Hence, some Kazakhs herded in the harvested farmlands where some remains of the crops were left, which can be used as natural fodders for their livestock. I also observed some weeds nearby the roads in First Pasture; some Kazakhs had just herded small flocks of livestock along the road edges. Other Kazakhs who had fewer farm animals just fed the livestock in their own yards. I randomly asked several Kazakhs and Han farmers I met during the fieldwork, and none of them remembered when pastures were replaced by farmlands.

The agriculturalization of First Pasture reveals a mode of agricultural development in which Kazakh pastoralism is transformed into agriculture by Altay authorities and Han settlers. The example of First Pasture has significance because it is the first ever state-owned pasture in Altay Prefecture, which aimed to transform Kazakh nomadism into socialist pastoralism through sedentarization. However, First Pasture has not become the socialist pasture envisioned by early Chinese authorities; on the contrary, it has become an agricultural production base with little space for local Kazakhs to herd livestock. In the decades of development in First Pasture, Han settlers moved in and developed agriculture to gradually replace Kazakh pastures. As a result, Kazakh–Han rural segregation and inequality have formed in First Pasture in which Han settlers occupy the fertile land for cultivation while Kazakh herders are pushed to the sterile land on the periphery. The case of First Pasture shows how dispossession and cultural replacement and genocide against sedentarized Kazakhs, in particular, have been achieved through the development of agriculture.

In the case of First Pasture, Chinese authorities have gradually dispossessed the sedentarized Kazakhs and achieved cultural replacement and genocide through the development of agriculture for decades. The latest mode of agricultural development in Altay Prefecture, however, only took

a few years to rapidly replace Kazakh pastures with modern agricultural industries. Lasti Village, a Kazakh village in which I conducted fieldwork, serves as an example to show how the latest development of agriculture has dispossessed Kazakhs, eliminated Kazakh culture, and articulated the rural economic production into the urban market process.

Lasti Village is located in the north of Altay City, and a majority of its inhabitants are ethnic Kazakhs. Because Lasti Village is close to Kazakh summer pastures where the natural landscapes are spectacular, I visited it with my friends several times when I was in elementary and middle school. I still remember watching the grazing cattle and sheep in the large green pastures along Noget Road ten years ago. Nevertheless, when I visited Lasti Village in September 2020, the large pasture near Noget Road was replaced by a set of greenhouses. The Lasti government has introduced finances, technologies, professionals, and enterprises from Counterparts Xinjiang Aid provinces (Jilin and Heilongjiang) to rapidly transform Kazakh pastures into modern agricultural industries in the name of poverty alleviation.

The Counterparts Xinjiang Aid campaign was launched by top Chinese authorities in 2010 and uses professionals, technologies, management experience, and finances from 19 relatively well-developed Chinese provinces to support the economic development and social stability in corresponding cities, counties, and the XPCC divisions in Xinjiang.⁸⁸ In Counterparts Xinjiang Aid, two northeastern provinces (Jilin and Heilongjiang) are assigned to support the city, XPCC division, and six counties in Altay Prefecture: Jilin paired up with Altay City, Burqin County, Jeminay County, and Kaba County, while Heilongjiang paired up with Burultogay County, Qinggil County, Koktoghay County, and the Tenth Division of XPCC (Beitun).

Supported by Jilin Province, Altay authorities have dispossessed Kazakh pastures and built a

⁸⁸ Counterparts Xinjiang Aid, which can heavily reshape the economy of the targeted regions, imitates a reconstruction mode for post-disaster regions. See https://web.archive.org/web/20221107032506/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.chinaxinjiang.cn/zhuanti/2017/08/5/201707/t20170711_555118.htm.

modern agricultural project, named Altay City Ecological Tourist Agriculture Poverty Alleviation Construction Project, in the name of poverty alleviation. The project received a fund of 13 million Chinese dollars and is technically supported by Northeast Ecological Agriculture Development Corporation Limited, a corporation from Jilin Province which specializes in designing and manufacturing multi-functional greenhouses.



Figure 2. Altay City Ecological Tourist Agriculture Poverty Alleviation Construction Project Between August and December 2019, the project was built by Altay City Agriculture Rural Bureau and Altay City Sewage Purification Management Bureau. The project consists of one large, wide-span greenhouse and four energy-saving sunlight greenhouses. The large, wide-spin greenhouse cultivates tropical and subtropical fruits (e.g., mango, loquat, myrica rubra, pomelo, and banana), which could normally not survive in Altay Prefecture due to its cold, semi-arid climate. Nevertheless, with the help of the greenhouse, the fruits can thrive in suitable environments (i.e., warm temperatures and relatively high humidity). The other four energy-saving sunlight greenhouses cultivate vegetables (e.g., celery, tomato, eggplant, and pepper).

Noticeably, in 2021, the project built 30 more energy-saving sunlight greenhouses, which implies an expansive trend of the modern agricultural industry in the village.⁸⁹



Figure 3. Five greenhouses in the Project

Though, according to Altay authorities, the project has alleviated 134 poverty households and imparted agricultural techniques to local herders and farmers, in reality, local Kazakh herders are dispossessed and exploited, and their productive and social reproductive activities are further separated. Since the project is built upon the former Kazakh pastures, Altay authorities have been dispossessing the land of local Kazakh herders through land transfer.⁹⁰ As a result, the dispossessed Kazakhs become waged laborers who are then hired by the project in the name of poverty alleviation, and their productive and social reproductive activities are further separated through the work in the project. Moreover, similar to the latest mode of husbandry industries in

89 See <https://web.archive.org/web/20221108173343/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/https://m.gmw.cn/baijia/2021-09/08/1302563707.html>.

90 See <https://web.archive.org/web/20221108022731/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.btx.com.cn/web/2022/3/25/ART11648183360196935.html>.

Altay Prefecture, clear pattern of ethnic hierarchy exists in the project. At the top of the hierarchy are two project leaders, Zhang Yunhua and Zhang Wende, both of whom are ethnic Han. Coincidentally, the current party secretary of Lasti Village is Zhang Xiaolin, who has the exact same surname as the two project leaders, which might imply nepotism. The middle of the hierarchy is also occupied by Han Chinese managers and technicians from Jilin who are responsible for guiding local herders and farmers to grow fruits and vegetables in the greenhouses. At the bottom, local Kazakhs are hired to cultivate fruits and vegetables under the guidance of Han Chinese technicians. The mode is called “Party + Corporation + Farmer,” in which the party division of Lasti Village and the corporation from Jilin dominate the project while Kazakh farmers are exploited at the bottom.

Aside from the pasture dispossession and ethnic hierarchy, the project has also articulated the rural agricultural industries into the urban market in favor of the Han settler consumers in urban Altay regions. In 2022, Altay authorities began to develop “Orders Agriculture,” in which the party division of Lasti Village leads farmers to sign contracts with certain corporations so that farmers must cultivate certain types of crops which will be directly sold to corporations at a fixed price.⁹¹ The corporations include not only the ones from Jilin province in Counterparts Xinjiang Aid but also some local corporations owned by local Han Chinese.⁹² The corporations then sell the products in the urban market for mainly Han consumers. As a result, the agricultural industries have been articulated into the urban Altay market for the consumption of Han Chinese settlers since the Chinese national market does not have an urgent need for grain and vegetable supply from a husbandry-focused region.

91 See

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221108174101/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/https://www.163.com/dy/article/HIJHT9HG0553UDVH.html>.

92 For example, Altay City Green Health Ecological Agriculture Development Corporation Limited has signed contracts with 36 farmers. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20221108174801/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://news.ts.cn/system/2018/09/17/035380587.shtml>.

Besides modern agricultural industries developed in Lasti Village, another new mode of agricultural development has occurred in Kazakh social reproductive space. During my trip to First Pasture in 2020, the latest housing project was in development to further restructure the Kazakh social reproductive space in the name of poverty alleviation. The new housing project, called Peace and Prosperity Living Project, includes modern-style houses with small gardens designed for household agricultural cultivation. During my visit to One Pasture, I learned that, though local Kazakhs had already lived in mudbrick houses built by the local construction company, they could still preserve part of their pastoral activities. For example, many Kazakhs set their yurts and fed livestock in the yards while their Han counterparts used the yards to grow vegetables, fruits, and chicken. Nevertheless, in the new housing project, Kazakhs cannot keep livestock and yurts anymore since the yards will be replaced by smaller gardens.

At the same time, Altay authorities have been promoting Three-Seeds Project (Chi. 三苗工程) as part of the “garden economy” which encourages Kazakh herders to grow vegetables, fruits, and chickens in the new gardens, thus shifting their “unhealthy” diets.⁹³ Hence, with the new housing project and Three-Seeds Project, Kazakhs might lose the last pastoral cultures in their most private living space: home. The garden economy might burden Kazakh women since, in most cases, they are responsible for social reproductive activities in the households. Forced by Chinese authorities, Kazakh women are required to learn gardening knowledge and techniques. As a result, Chinese agricultural traditions have invaded the Kazakh social reproductive space, which aims to further replace Kazakh pastoral and dietary cultures with Chinese ones.

In all three cases above, the development of agriculture has reflected Chinese racist attitudes toward Kazakh pastoralism and diets. Different from the husbandry industries in the previous section, Kazakh pastoralism is regarded as backward and unproductive by Altay authorities as well as the Xinjiang Aid provinces. In the name of poverty alleviation, the Chinese state has been

93 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/175e6c38-7fb4-41e5-81f9-bd270f774d8c.html>.

replacing the “backward” Kazakh pastoralism with agricultural industries. Moreover, Kazakh traditional diets, which are mainly meat-based, are regarded as savage and unhealthy while Han Chinese diets, which are mainly based on grains and vegetables, are regarded as civil and healthy by the Chinese state. For example, in the Three-Seeds Project, rural Kazakh households are forced to replace livestock in the yards with fruits, vegetables, and chickens, thus shifting their diets.

In agriculture, the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and accumulation through the genocidal management of Kazakh identity and culture. Different from Kazakh cultural alienation in husbandry, agriculture eliminates the Kazakh pastoral culture and replaces it with Chinese crop-growing traditions as part of a cultural genocide against the Kazakhs. In the latest mode of agricultural production (e.g., the Project in Lasti Village), an ethnic hierarchy has been created in which Kazakh identity is exploited as it is in husbandry. Different from the economic articulation in husbandry, however, which connects local husbandry production to the Chinese national market through Chinese enterprises, rural agricultural production has been articulated into the urban Altay market for the consumption of the local Han settlers. In Altay Prefecture, the development of agriculture has not only further separated the productive and social reproductive activities of the Kazakhs, as husbandry does, but has also directly invaded rural Kazakh social reproductive space, resulting in the replacement of Kazakh pastoral culture and meat-based diets by Han Chinese gardening cultures and grain- and vegetable-based diets. In the next section, I examine dispossession and capital accumulation in ethnic tourism, which has commodified and exploited Kazakh/Tuva culture and identity, invaded Kazakh social reproductive space, and circulated the produced value in the Chinese national and international markets.

4.4.3 Ethnic Tourism: Commodifying Kazakh/Tuva Culture

The development of ethnic tourism in Altay Prefecture has been closely related to Kazakhs and

Tuva people (a Mongolic Kazakh ethnic group), whose land is dispossessed, cultures grabbed and commodified, and social reproductive space converged with the productive one. As a result, the Kazakh/Tuva land, culture, and social reproductive space have been articulated into the Chinese national and international tourist industries. Below I use two cases from my ethnographic work to analyze how the Chinese state has achieved dispossession and capital accumulation in the ethnic tourism of Altay Prefecture through the restructuring of the relationship between Kazakhs/Tuva people and their culture and social reproductive space as well as the Chinese national and international tourist industries.

To first contextualize tourism in in Altay Prefecture, it is important to note that it is the biggest industry in the Prefecture, producing an income of 23.6 billion Chinese dollars in 2021 (compared to the total output of the primary industry, including agriculture and husbandry, of 13.2 billion Chinese dollars in the same year). There exist two possible reasons why tourism has been thriving and prioritized in Altay Prefecture. First, Altay Prefecture has tourist resources that are outstanding, even nationwide. According to Tourist Attraction Quality Management Measures published in 2012, tourist attractions in China have five ranks, from the lowest one-A rank to the highest five-A rank.⁹⁴ Altay Prefecture has three five-A sites (Kanas scenic resort, Koktoghay scenic resort, and White Sand Lake scenic resort) and twelve four-A sites.⁹⁵ Second, Altay authorities consider tourism as an eco-friendly economic growth mode that fits into Xi's Ecological Civilization. As Xi Jinping said, "green water and cyan mountains are mountains with gold and silver," which means that good ecological environments are valuable assets to boost economic growth. Based on Xi's instructions, Altay authorities have regarded tourism as a great option for economic growth. Since the tourist industry is embedded into almost all levels of the economy in Altay Prefecture, here I only look at the part of it which is directly related to

94 See the official website of PRC's Culture and Tourism Ministry:
https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxxgkml/zcfg/gfxwj/202012/t20201204_906214.html.

95 See the official website of PRC's Culture and Tourism Ministry:
<https://zwwf.mct.gov.cn/scenicspot?ssName=&province=%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86&ssYear=&type=gb&pageNum=2>.
Visit the official website of Xinjiang Culture and Tourism Bureau to see the four-A list:
<http://wlt.xinjiang.gov.cn/wlt/4ajjq/202204/9a73bc1e07a0402ca76aee6e66ad8ce2.shtml>.

Kazakh/Tuva land, cultures, and social reproductive space: ethnic tourism.



Figure 4. A Kazakh household in Burqin County running Herder's Home Entertainment (*Mujiale*)

As part of ethnic tourism in Altay Prefecture, Herder's Home Entertainment (*Mujiale*) (Chi. 牧家乐), sometimes also called Farmer's Home Entertainment (*Nongjiale*) (Chi. 农家乐) when the owners are Han Chinese or Huis, is a tourist project based on Kazakh sedentarization.⁹⁶ *Mujiale* can be regarded as a replica of home stay-ins in ethnic tourism in Yunnan Province (Shen, 2019). Its initial purpose was to allow tourists to experience Kazakh cultures and bring income to sedentarized Kazakh herders. In *Mujiale*, tourists live in renovated yurts, eat local foods, and enjoy Kazakh dances and songs. In 2009, along with the beginning of high-standard

⁹⁶ The earliest information regarding *Mujiale* available is from 2005. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20221109015159/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.cnhubei.com/200508/ca832160.htm>.

sedentarization projects, the government in Jeminay County began to develop “top-quality *Nongjiale (Mujiale)*” as the first step to promote tourism.⁹⁷ During the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (from 2011 to 2015), the Altay authorities began to regulate and guide *Mujiale/Nongjiale* and coordinated it with larger tourist industries.⁹⁸ During my fieldwork in Burqin County, I found some obsolete Kazakh-style yurts nearby the roads toward Kanas; however, different from the traditional Kazakh yurts made of wood, these ones were built from the ground by cement and steel, totally eliminating the mobility of the yurts. I then found a Chinese corporation in Henan Province, Jinyuanli Corporation Limited, which built Kazakh-style yurts in Altay Prefecture in 2020.⁹⁹ The corporation specializes in manufacturing Mongolian-style yurts from wood, steel, and other high-tech materials. The yurts are sold to restaurants and hotels in tourist attractions across China and even in many foreign countries (e.g., South Korea, Australia, Libya, and Kuwait).¹⁰⁰

This case demonstrates a unique example of Kazakh cultural commodification in ethnic tourism. In this case, the Kazakh yurt culture has been remade by both the Chinese market process and local Kazakhs. Different from the material commodities produced by indigenous people and sold to the tourists, the “Kazakh” yurts are produced by a Chinese company thousands of miles away and sold to the Kazakhs who then sell the use value of the yurts on the imagined Kazakh pastures to the tourists. As Shepherd (2002) argued, there is no clear boundary between commodified culture and authentic one. Though the yurts are highly commodified, the Kazakhs who use the yurts to run *Mujiale* are making a living and reinventing the meanings of Kazakh “pastoralism” in the Chinese tourist industries.

97 Here “top-quality” means a high level of tourist services. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20221109021116/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/0ae72e41-76a6-451e-b48e-0f72e362793e.html>.

98 See <https://web.archive.org/web/20221109203714/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003004/20180620/e3a0da78-8091-4c69-9432-933e7d041217.html>.

99 See <http://www.jinyuanli888.com/586.html>.

100 See <http://www.jinyuanli888.com/about.html>.

Moreover, in *Mujiale*, the Kazakh domestic sphere is invaded by the market process, which is different from the typical process of accumulation that seeks to separate productive and domestic social reproductive activities. To the Chinese tourist industries, Kazakh private homes are no different from forests, mountains, and rivers, and all of them are commodified to satisfy the tourists' experience by providing use value. The commodification of Kazakh private homes has negative impacts on Kazakhs, especially Kazakh women who are responsible for social reproductive work. In Li's (2004) study that counted 405,956 Kazakh households in China, 99.23 percent of them had males as the household heads, which reflects a relatively strong patriarchal tradition in Kazakh culture. Hence, in most Kazakh households who run *Mujiale*, Kazakh women are forced to accommodate their social reproductive activities to tourists who have normally uncertain and different schedules.

My family once visited a *Mujiale* run by a Kazakh household. Since we ate lunch at noon, the Kazakh household prolonged their lunchtime by two hours in order to prepare meals for us. After they had finished their lunch, the Kazakh household immediately began to prepare our dinner without a rest. As Chua et al. (2022) suggested, the work–life conflict the workers experience in tourism and hospitality can lead to psychological stress. Hence, Kazakhs who run *Mujiale* are risking potential physical and psychological illnesses. Moreover, in most cases, Kazakh women are responsible for both tourist services—often the hardest part of the services, such as preparing meals, dancing, singing, laundry, and cleaning—and social reproductive work (e.g., feeding the household, childcare, cleaning, and laundry). As a result, in *Mujiale*, Kazakh women normally suffer the most negative consequences from this commercial mode. Through the commodification of Kazakh homes and exploitation of Kazakh households and women, the Chinese tourist industries have been accumulating capital in Altay Prefecture.

Kazakh–Han inequality also exists in the *Mujiale/Nongjiale*. In Xinjiang, *Mujiale/Nongjiale* are

ranked from the lowest one-star to the highest five-stars.¹⁰¹ As of April 2022, there are 92 star-levelled *Mujiale/Nongjiale* in Altay Prefecture:

Rank	Quantity
Five-star	0
Four-star	29
Three-star	35
Two-star	26
One-star	2

Table 1. The distribution of *Mujiale/Nongjiale* ranks in Altay Prefecture

Considering the fact that Altay Prefecture had 358 *Mujiale/Nongjiale* in 2012, the majority of *Mujiale/Nongjiale* have no stars. I used the Aiqicha website and Xinjiang New Business List, two professional business search engines, to investigate the owners of all star-level *Mujiale/Nongjiale* in Altay Prefecture, and I found a clear uneven distribution in their ethnicities:

Rank	Owners with Turkic names	Owners with Han/Hui names	Unidentifiable <i>Mujiale/Nongjiale</i>
Four-star	7	19	3
Three-star	14	18	3
Two-star	20	4	2
One-star	1	1	0
Total	42	42	8

Table 2. The ethnic distribution of star-levelled *Mujiale/Nongjiale* in Altay Prefecture

As shown in Table 2, except for eight *Mujiale/Nongjiale* with unknown owners, the number of star-levelled *Mujiale/Nongjiale* owned by Turkic persons (mostly Kazakhs) is 42, equal to those

101 Visit the official website of Xinjiang Culture and Tourism Bureau to see the lists: http://wlt.xinjiang.gov.cn/wlt/xjnjlgzfw_list2.shtml.

owned by Han/Hui. Considering the fact that Kazakhs are the significant majority in rural Altay Prefecture, the star-ranking system in rural *Mujiale/Nongjiale* significantly prefers ethnic Han/Hui. Moreover, half of *Mujiale/Nongjiale* owned by Kazakhs are ranked as two-star and one-star while nearly 90 percent of *Mujiale/Nongjiale* owned by Han/Hui are ranked as four-star and three-star. According to the 2013 Implementation Opinions of Leisure Agriculture/Husbandry and Rural Tourism Development in Altay Prefecture, only three-star or above *Mujiale/Nongjiale* can receive subsidies from the governments, and high-ranked *Mujiale/Nongjiale* can get more loans and media exposure than lower-ranked ones. Hence, the ranking system is ethnically biased preferring Han Chinese and Huis over the Kazakh majority. Though the Kazakh households who run *Mujiale/Nongjiale* have been exploited for the Chinese capital accumulation and suffering physical and psychological harm, they do not receive enough financial support as their Han counterparts did. The ranking system in *Mujiale/Nongjiale* facilitates accumulation by producing value from the different treatments between Kazakhs and Han households.

Mujiale/Nongjiale still allows some Kazakhs to preserve parts of their autonomy since they can renovate their yards into Kazakh-style hotels and run the businesses by themselves. Vacation villages, however, totally dispossess Kazakh and ethnic minority houses and excluded them from the tourist industries. In September 2020, I visited Hem Village, an indigenous village built by ethnic Tuva people, a mixed ethnicity of Kazakhs and Mongols. Hem is located in Burqin County and is the largest and most isolated Tuva village with the most well-preserved Tuva cultures.¹⁰² The village has 1,800 residents, 1,400 of whom are ethnic Tuva while the rest are Kazakhs. Unlike nomadic Kazakhs who live in mobile yurts, Tuva people and Kazakhs in Hem built wooden houses with steep tops in the valley and hardly migrated. Hence, in Hem, there are hundreds of spectacular wooden houses with yards neatly arranged in a valley.

102 See <https://www.xjxmw.com/c/2021-08-19/1731472.shtml>.

The highly isolated village began to be reached by the Chinese state in 2006 when the Kanas Scenic Spot Committee of the CCP and the Kanas Scenic Spot Management Committee were founded. In 2007, Kanas Scenic Spot was selected as one of the first five-A scenic spots in China.¹⁰³ Since then, with strong support from Chinese authorities, the tourist industry in Kanas Scenic Spot has been rapidly developing, and Hem, as part of Kanas Scenic Spot, also experienced a rapid transformation from a traditional Tuva village into a modern tourist attraction. In 2009, Chinese authorities invested 94 million Chinese dollars in Kanas Scenic Spot, which built a tourist cycle route that connects major scenic sites in Kanas: Jiadengyu, White Kaba, Naryn, and Hem.¹⁰⁴ The route provides a modern transportation channel not only for tourists but also the construction companies who further built modern facilities in Hem. In 2010, 100 herders were sedentarized in Hem by the local authorities, and Hem villagers began to access electricity, gas stations, and rural credit services.¹⁰⁵

In 2014, Chinese authorities further tightened their control over the indigenous residents in Hem in the name of Ecological Civilization since Burqin County was selected as the first Ecological Civilization Construction Demonstration County in Xinjiang.¹⁰⁶ The land grabbing in the village happened in 2016 when Kanas Scenic Spot Management Committee began to propagate the knowledge of socialist collective ownership and require Hem villagers to apply for Collective Land Usage Permissions.¹⁰⁷ After the villagers lost the ownership of their houses and lands, local authorities further restrained their autonomy in the name of Ecological Civilization. In 2016, 10 Hem villagers who extracted sand were arrested by the local inspection team.¹⁰⁸ The

103 See <https://zwfw.mct.gov.cn/scenicspot/scenicspotDetail?uuid=220&type=gb>.

104 See

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221110185156/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/6e845c0f-a696-4052-b636-7e57663a9b49.html>.

105 See

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221110194337/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/4ec7be75-ebc6-4799-bba6-310a4723f700.html>.

106 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/f788a647-20c4-432c-8270-90d715f1f95a.html>.

107 See

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221110203717/http://web.archive.org/screenshot/http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/864d2266-8b68-4dac-8680-ba5200723112.html> and <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003006/20180620/d1984085-a106-4757-af2c-025914aab35e.html>.

108 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/9f6f1b04-04e7-4d45-ae20-9ed0e0bed2d2.html>.

villagers received environmental education, and their two tractors were expropriated. In the same year, the Altay Prefecture Grassland Department did a grassland survey in Hem, which provides a foundation for regulations and prohibitions on herding activities in the village.¹⁰⁹ In 2017, Kanas Scenic Spot Management Committee started a crackdown on the “illegal activities” in the village which were accused of harming the environment. During the three-month-long crackdown, Chinese authorities bulldozed 212 houses that were privately built without government permission.¹¹⁰ The Chinese authorities accused those Hem villagers of lacking ecological awareness, illegally occupying collectively owned lands, and building modern-style houses that tarnished the “authentic” style of Hem.



Figure 5. Dispossessed Tuva houses in Hem Village

109 See <http://www.xjalt.gov.cn/003/003005/20180620/d873ad17-7a9b-42cc-8388-8315f7e4bc44.html>.

110 See <http://www.altxw.com/news/system/2020/08/21/030062298.shtml>.

Similar to how local authorities committed land grabbing against nomadic Kazakhs, they employed the powerful state mechanism to dispossess the land of Tuva/Kazakh people in the name of Ecological Civilization. In the case of Hem, however, Tuva houses are dispossessed in the name of cultural protection. In the name of protecting “authentic” Tuva culture, local authorities bulldozed 212 newly-built houses in the village considered too “modern” for the village. During my trip to Hem, however, the majority of Tuva houses were renovated by Han and Hui business people as restaurants and hotels with modern facilities of hot water, electricity, and internet. Hence, to Chinese authorities, Ecological Civilization and Tuva cultural protection are both excuses; their real purpose is to dispossess Tuva/Kazakh people and deprive them of their autonomy. The case of hem also shows how powerful and efficient the Chinese state mechanism can be. Within just four years, the Chinese authorities have not only completely dispossessed all Tuva and Kazakh residents in Hem but also totally transformed the village into a modern tourist site with comprehensive facilities and services.

During my trip to Hem in September 2020, the majority of Tuva and Kazakh people had left the village, and their houses were occupied by Han and Hui business people who renovated the houses as restaurants and hotels with modern facilities: hot water, electricity, and internet. An ethnically Han hotel owner told me that he rented the house from an ethnic Tuva because Tuva people cannot speak Chinese (Mandarin) and are therefore unable to run the business to serve Han tourists. Tuva material culture was used for decorating the restaurants. Some Han hotel owners even dressed as “Tuva/Kazakh” people to satisfy the tourists’ experience. Tuva and Kazakh script was placed by the Chinese one, and the guide map used three scripts—Chinese, English, and Korean—to serve both Chinese and international tourists. The village was crowded with Han tourists and business people. I only met several Tuva people in backyards where they were doing laundry or construction work and on the streets where they were providing some “ethnic” services for the tourists, such as horse riding.



Figure 6. A Tuva house transformed by Han Chinese into a restaurant

Figure 6 shows how Chinese business people have commodified Tuva culture in ethnic tourism. In tourism, Tuva material culture (e.g., houses, clothing, and embroideries) and cultural performance (e.g., horse riding) are commodified to produce value by satisfying the tourists' desire for exotic experiences. Different from the cultural commodification in *Mujiiale*, however, the commodification of Tuva culture is outside of Tuva and Kazakh people. On most occasions, Chinese business people provide services to Chinese tourists through commodified Tuva culture, and the majority of Tuva and Kazakh people are absent.

While the majority of Tuva and Kazakh people are displaced, those who stayed and work in tourism reflect a Tuva/Kazakh–Han hierarchy. During my fieldwork, many hotel owners and the local government in Hem hired some Tuva and Kazakh people to do laundry, construction work, and ethnic tourist services. Not surprisingly, in tourism, the Tuva and Kazakh people are

concentrated in the low-status, low-wage occupations while Han Chinese are managers and bosses. In the ethnic hierarchy, the Tuva and Kazakh identities have been commodified and exploited to produce value for Chinese capital accumulation.

Ethnic tourism, as the biggest industry in Altay Prefecture, has been built into primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. Here I only analyzed two typical modes of ethnic tourism in Altay Prefecture, *Mujiale* and ethnic vacation villages (Hem). There are many other examples of Kazakh cultural commodification in Altay Prefecture, such as the seasonal migration activities performed by the remained nomadic Kazakhs that are commodified into a tourist festival for Han Chinese visitors.¹¹¹ During the festival, the Chinese authorities organize Kazakhs to perform traditional Kazakh activities, such as *Kala Jorgha* (a traditional dance), wrestling, and horse racing, for Han tourists as part of “cultural tourism.” There are also secondary industries that hire Kazakh women to manufacture Kazakh hats, carpets, clothes, embroideries, and other products, which are then sold in tourist attractions and the Chinese national market.

Ethnic tourism in Altay Prefecture has articulated the Kazakh and Tuva ethnic identities and their culture into the Chinese market process at a national and international level. Chinese and international tourists from other provinces and countries consume the use value of Kazakh and Tuva culture and services in *Mujiale* or Hem Village. As a result, the value produced through the Kazakh and Tuva labor and cultural commodification has circulated into the Chinese national and international market process. Ethnic tourism in Altay Prefecture can also be regarded as part of Chinese racial capitalism in which the Kazakh homeland is racialized and exploited for its cultural value and consumed by the Han regions.

111 See the report: <http://finance.sina.com.cn/tech/2020-10-09/doc-iivhvpwz1011006.shtml>.

5.0 Conclusions

In Altay Prefecture, a border region inhabited by nomadic Turkic Muslims, Chinese authorities have implemented a decade-long Kazakh project since 2009 to achieve dispossession and accumulation through land grabbing, the racialization and exploitation of Kazakh identity, the commodification and elimination of Kazakh culture, and the restructuring of the relationship between productive and social reproductive activities in relation to Kazakh land. Justified by Ecological Civilization, Chinese authorities have dispossessed Kazakh land and destructed Kazakh nomadism. In the name of poverty alleviation, Chinese authorities have then built husbandry, agriculture, and tourism to continue dispossession and accumulation. Through a powerful state mechanism (i.e., a combination of bureaucracies, technologies, laws, regulations, security forces, and propaganda), the Chinese state has dispossessed and sedentarized tens of thousands of Kazakh nomadic households in only ten years. In husbandry, the Chinese state has replaced part of the Kazakh livestock-feeding culture with high-tech methods while commodifying and exploiting the rest of the culture to accumulate capital. In agriculture, the Chinese state has totally replaced Kazakh pastoral culture with Chinese agricultural traditions in both productive and social reproductive spaces. In ethnic tourism, the Chinese state has commodified and exploited both Kazakh and Tuva material culture and cultural performances with and without indigenous participation.

In husbandry and agriculture, Kazakh productive activities are separated from social reproductive ones. In “garden economy” and *Mujiale*, Kazakh social reproductive space has been invaded by Chinese culture and productive activities, which can further burden Kazakh women. All three industries have reflected a Chinese mode of racial capitalism in which Kazakh identity and culture are exploited to produce value for Han Chinese regions and people. Nevertheless, each industry has been uniquely articulated into the Chinese market process. While agriculture has been articulated in the urban Altay regions to feed the needs of Han settlers, the value

produced in husbandry and tourism has circulated in the Chinese national and international market process. Moreover, while husbandry produces goods for the Chinese market through exports, the value produced in tourism is consumed inside Altay Prefecture by transporting outside consumers into the region.

This study contributes to our understanding of how neoliberalism operates in one of China's ethnic minority border regions. In Altay Prefecture, neoliberalism cooperates with the powerful state mechanism to build a Chinese mode of racial and ethnic capitalism that is based on Han centrism (Friend & Thayer, 2018). Moreover, in Altay Prefecture, in order to make value for accumulation, ethnic minority (Kazakh) culture is managed through commodification, alienation, and elimination for different needs in different industries simultaneously. Additionally, in order to make value, industries can be articulated into the market process in different ways. In the production–reproduction relations, sometimes value can be produced by directly exploiting social reproductive activities rather than through provisioning values (Razavi, 2009), as the case of *Mujiale* shows. This study provides valuable insight into how neoliberalism creates value in one of China's ethnic minority regions through the making of ethnicity and culture.

For Chinese authorities, the Kazakh project continues as the majority of landless Kazakhs, defined as rural surplus labor power, have flowed into urban Han-dominated regions to seek jobs. During my fieldwork in 2020, massive rural Kazakh populations were flowing into Altay City at a tremendous rate I had not previously seen. At that time, securitization was still highlighted by Chen Quanguo, and most Kazakh immigrants fed themselves by working as security guards or *Shequ* workers for the government to strengthen the systems of security, surveillance, governance, and oppression against themselves. Another way through which Chinese authorities manage rural landless Kazakh populations is by transferring them to forced labor camps to work for the Chinese manufacturing factories across the whole country.¹¹²

112 See the report from the Bureau of International Labor Affairs of the United States: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/against-their-will-the-situation-in-xinjiang>.

However, the highly securitized system in Xinjiang is unsustainable. At the same time, the labor camps have been fiercely condemned by some international human rights organizations and 43 countries, and related Chinese officials and entities are sanctioned by the United States, United Kingdom, EU, and Canada and Xinjiang-manufactured goods prohibited by the United States.¹¹³ Chinese authorities will continue to confront Kazakh-related issues in the future, and Kazakh riots are likely to occur if Chinese authorities do not fulfill their promises on poverty alleviation and Common Prosperity for Kazakhs.

This study has two implications. First, it reveals how China's policies are formed and adopted in an ethnic minority region in Xi's era. In response to national goals, Altay authorities have merged the discourses of Ecological Civilization and the Anti-Poverty War with the goals of neoliberal development and ethnic integration to form a series of tailored policies targeting Kazakhs. In the process, Altay authorities have deciphered national policies and translated them into the local context. Though systemic corruption exists, the tailored policies have been implemented at both an incredibly quick pace and a large scale.

Second, this study can provide insight into China's OBORI from a border perspective. As part of China's response to the 2008 financial crisis, the OBORI was launched by Xi in order to integrate more land, resources, and labor power into the Chinese economy across Eurasia, East Africa, and Southeast Asia. In the OBORI, Xinjiang has played a vital role due to its proximity to Central Asia. Three out of six main economic corridors in the OBORI make Xinjiang a central hub.¹¹⁴ Altay Prefecture, as the only region in Xinjiang that borders both Russia and Kazakhstan, has four national-level type-1 land ports and one national-level Border Economic Cooperation Zone. Hence, Altay Prefecture has been given an important role in the OBORI as a

113 See <https://onu.delegfrance.org/we-call-on-china-to-allow-immediate-meaningful-and-unfettered-access-to> and: <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2021/03/canada-joins-international-partners-in-imposing-new-sanctions-in-response-to-human-rights-violations-in-xinjiang.html>.

114 See <http://www.sic.gov.cn/News/455/6103.htm>.

hub in the northern corridor of Xinjiang's Silk Road Economic Belt.¹¹⁵ In Altay's latest Five-Year Plan (2021–2025), Chinese authorities plan to deepen economic ties with Russia and Kazakhstan by linking Jeminay Port with the New Eurasia Land Bridge Corridor and building the Western Line Project of Sino–Russian Oil Pipes and Sino–Russian Jikepulin Port in Altay Prefecture. This study explicates how the Chinese state develops neoliberalism through the management of ethnic Kazakhs, which can expand understanding of how Chinese capitalist expansion might operate in Russia and Kazakhstan in the future through the management of racial and ethnic groups beyond China's borders.

Due to the limitations of research methods, I conducted fieldwork in only a few locations. If I have the chance to safely return to Altay Prefecture in the future, I would like to investigate some specific spots and interview certain groups. First, I will do fieldwork in Qinggil where the Kazakh population is significantly larger, the Han population significantly smaller, and the poverty rate higher, compared to other counties. In Qinggil, local authorities probably encounter more problems in adopting the policies. Second, I will interview rural Kazakhs who have directly experienced land dispossession and struggled in urban life. Third, I will interview Kazakh women in both urban and rural regions in order to understand their everyday experiences of the intense social restructuring in Altay Prefecture. Fourth, I would like to do fieldwork at the four import–export ports in Altay Prefecture where goods and services flow between China, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Mongolia, which would contextualize how local Kazakhs nearby the ports are involved in China's international trade networks. In future studies, it is important to study how the Chinese capitalist expansion operates in Central Asian countries; how the expansion is restructuring the local political economy as well as the everyday experience of local residents; how the governments as well as residents in Central Asia resist against, negotiate, cooperate with China in the process; and how China responds to the potential resistance and negotiations.

115 See <http://www.altxw.com/ggxx/system/2021/06/22/030089613.shtml>.

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