

# Towards a Transnational History of Great Leaps Forward in Pastoral Central Eurasia

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**Abstract:** The article places the great famine in Kazakhstan (1931-33) in the context of policies implemented by the Stalinist and Maoist governments towards Central Eurasian pastoral populations. After highlighting the factors that caused the famine in Ukraine, the article focuses on the specificities of the famine among the Kazakhs, and its regional distribution within Kazakhstan. It then analyses the role that the same factors could have played in other mainly pastoral regions, both during the 1930s (Kyrgyz ASSR, Outer Mongolia), and during Mao's Great Leap Forward (Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Qinghai, Xinjiang). The article compares the different cases and investigates their transnational connections.

**Keywords:** Famines, Pastoralism, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Great Leap Forward

## INTRODUCTION

**C**omparative studies of the famines in the USSR (1931-33) and Communist China (1959-61) have most often been individualizing comparisons in order to better understand the dynamics of one of the two macro-events.<sup>1</sup> An analysis connecting the creation of Stalinist systems in the countryside of Central Eurasian pastoral regions—Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Mongolia, and Inner Mongolia—is still lacking. Such a study could make the socio-economic history of mid-twentieth century pastoral Central Eurasia a truly transnational history. By “pastoral regions” I do not mean

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<sup>1</sup> For a distinction between “individualizing” and “universalizing comparisons,” see Tilly 87-115.

areas inhabited only by herders. The presence of large populations of peasants, both within prevalently pastoral ethnic groups and among the immigrants from outside regions, is a very important part of the story. I use the expression as a catchphrase to indicate those areas of arid Central/Inner Asia where pastoralism was the main economic activity before technological innovations, parallel state-building efforts, and massive influxes of peasants turned them into regions of cereal production during the period from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The 1931-33 Soviet famines and the Chinese famine during the Great Leap Forward (hereafter GLF) obviously constitute crucial historical watersheds in this long-term process, but they did not bring about the immediate end of an ideal-typical nomadism. Instead they were the foremost demographic and socio-economic crises in a process that lasted decades and crossed political divides.

This future research agenda should follow two directions. The first would consist in placing pastoral Central Eurasia in the context of the wider Soviet and Chinese famines in order to understand the logic of the events in the pastoral regions by comparing them with non-pastoral areas at the epicentre of the Soviet and Chinese famines. The second would consist in exploring the connections between the pastoral areas within one country and those in different countries. This means comparing pastoral areas that suffered from the famine with those that were spared it (or the worst of it) in order to elucidate the main factors leading to the famines that the herder populations experienced. This also means going beyond a comparative approach and looking for connections among the Inner Asian pastoral regions in order to investigate the influence that measures taken in one country had on the prevalently pastoral populations in neighbouring states. That influence operated mainly in two ways: through international trade in livestock and through the implementation of similar policies by dependent or allied regimes. The implementation of this transnational research agenda is difficult because of the differences in access to primary sources in the relevant countries. Most important, it is now difficult, if not impossible, to gain access to relevant provincial archives in China. Consequently, there has been an imbalance of information in favour of the Soviet side of the story since the opening of former Soviet archives after 1991.

The transnational connection between the pastoral regions of the USSR and Mongolia is clear. It is less so between the USSR and China. In this paper I shall first survey the current knowledge about the place of the pastoral regions in the geography of the great famines in the USSR and China. I shall then outline the mechanisms of the 1931-33 famine in Kazakhstan on the basis of newly retrieved archival materials in Russia and Kazakhstan. The centrality of Kazakhstan in the research agenda sketched above should be

evident given that Kazakhstan was the area hit by the worst regional famine in both the USSR and China. Even at the present state of historical research, it is fair to argue that in the early 1930s Soviet Kazakhs were the only prevalently pastoral group in Inner Asia affected in their entirety by a deadly famine caused by the policies of collectivization, procurements, and sedentarization in the USSR, China, and Mongolia. The death of approximately a third of the Kazakh population, of which three-quarters were herders, begs comparison with the fate of other pastoral groups subjected to collectivization of their herds, forced sedentarization, and requisitions of a large part of their animals. To what extent did Mongols, Tibetans, Kyrgyz, and China's Kazakhs escape death by starvation and famine-related diseases? If they mostly did, why was this so given that the Communist regimes in the USSR and Mongolia in the 1930s and in China in the late 1950s and early 1960s implemented analogous policies towards the pastoralists? What relative role did the policies of resource extraction, agricultural colonization, geopolitical preoccupations, and transport infrastructures connecting pastoral regions with the core of their states or with neighboring states play in causing or escaping famine? How did the existence, absence, or implementational specifics of these policies change the twentieth-century history of pastoral Inner Asia?

Given the dearth of historical studies on these and related matters and the often thin documentary base we have to rely on, my conclusions are tentative. My main aim is to encourage future studies that will improve our knowledge of policies toward pastoralism in Inner Asia during the twentieth century, especially in the under-studied pastoral regions of China. The exceptionality of the Kazakh case is confirmed by the analysis that follows. Unlike other Inner Asian pastoral regions (but very much like Inner Mongolia and the territory inhabited by the Kyrgyz), Kazakhstan had been an area of peasant colonization since the late nineteenth century. This circumstance influenced the Stalinist leadership's view of the region and the political decisions that led to the famine (especially regarding grain requisitions). The Kremlin did not identify serious geopolitical threats from abroad as it did in relation to Mongolia. Again unlike Mongolia, Kazakhstan was relatively close and well connected to the political, economic, and demographic centre of the Soviet state. The crucial weight of Soviet livestock requisitioning in unleashing the Kazakh catastrophe is a major point that begs comparison with China's GLF famine. As I describe below, Soviet livestock requisitions were concentrated in the Kazakh steppe starting in the late summer of 1930 and were triggered by the collapse of livestock elsewhere in the USSR due to collectivization and the ongoing conflict between the state and the peasantry. Kazakh livestock was then primarily used to feed the urban population of Moscow and Leningrad.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF FOOD PRODUCTION, CONSUMPTION, AND FAMINE

*China*

Understanding the geography and timing of the 1931-33 Soviet and 1959-61 GLF famines is crucial for their interpretation because both famines show a spatial unevenness in their severity. We may speak about the two famines both in the singular and plural forms. We can analyze the pan-Soviet famine as a single event because hunger was generalized in the Soviet countryside and in all provincial urban centers and because the general causes of the widespread hunger in the countryside were common to the entire USSR—the policies of forced procurements and the total collectivization drive, both of which disorganized production. It is, however, legitimate to talk about Soviet “famines” because famine did not hit all areas in the USSR in a uniform way, nor were state policies the same everywhere.

The GLF famine also presents a pattern of marked geographical concentration. Anthony Garnaut has recently mapped the famine distribution across China through a comparison of age cohorts (i.e., fertility data in different regions) on the basis of China’s census data and figures on interregional grain transfers.<sup>2</sup> According to Garnaut, three broad areas crossing administrative (provincial) borders suffered the most: the area comprising east Sichuan and west Guizhou, the one uniting south Anhui and central Jiangsu, and the one comprising north Henan and north Shandong (Garnaut 317).<sup>3</sup> He has identified a number of regional famines concentrated in the areas that supplied most of the grain in the country and bore the burden of providing grain to urban and industrial areas across the country. The division between “grain surplus” and “grain deficit” areas, however, is only part of the story. In order to explain the geographic concentration of the famine, it is also crucial to take into consideration the limitations of China’s transport infrastructure at the time of the GLF. Garnaut sketched a convincing picture of the geographical concentration

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<sup>2</sup> Garnaut argued that focusing on grain transfers between regions and on fertility surveys and census data is the best way to assess the geographical distribution of food-consumption patterns, bypassing the notorious unreliability of official grain-production figures and the problematic nature of mortality trends, “which are heavily influenced by factors indirectly related to food supply such as infectious disease and state violence” (Garnaut 320).

<sup>3</sup> Henan, Sichuan and Anhui (along with Gansu) are the provinces covered by the selective English translation of Yang Jisheng’s seminal study (Yang 23-86, 197-247, and 269-319).

not only among different economic macro-regions but also at the sub-provincial level (i.e., at the prefecture administrative level). For China as a whole, the hardest-hit areas were the administrative macro-regions officially designated as “grain surplus” areas, and inside each province prefectures labeled as “grain surplus districts” (Garnaut 326, 336). Garnaut concluded that “[t]he main urban areas of China, and the adjacent handicrafts and industrial crop-growing areas, were not severely affected by famine. Neither were most of the remote and borderland areas that were poorly served by modern transport.... The implementation of the [national economic] plan led to the bifurcation of China into areas that were the focus of new industrial activity, and areas called upon to meet the new demand for material and other resources” (Garnaut 317).

As other studies have already made clear, during the GLF the regime funneled the country’s food production into the most urbanized and industrialized regions—Beijing, Shanghai, and the industrial Northeast (Dikötter 133-34). Garnaut concludes that “the worst affected areas were the ‘bread baskets’ of China’s forced-paced industrialization program, areas where in the second half of the 1950s the overriding aim of political work was to contribute to national grain procurement effort” (Garnaut 334). Interestingly, this pattern can be observed at different levels of the administrative structure: “These ‘bread baskets’ existed at different levels: the Southwest was the ‘bread basket’ of the nation; within the Southwest and each of the other economic coordination regions, certain prefectures became the focus of central government grain collection activities; and in several regions the demand for grain of second-tier cities was met through local collections in the adjacent rural prefectures” (Garnaut 335).

Finally, Garnaut mentions the impact of proximity to China’s international borders on the famine’s severity. He maintains that districts adjacent to those borders were lightly affected, most probably out of security concerns (perhaps also by the fear of causing waves of migration across the border). However, there were significant exceptions. Famine was relatively severe in border districts crossed by rail connections to countries that were receiving food exports from China, especially districts bordering on North Vietnam and North Korea but also the USSR (particularly the eastern and western border areas of Heilongjiang and the Ili valley in Xinjiang) (Garnaut 340).

### *The USSR*

Garnaut explicitly mentions that his study was inspired by scholarship on the Soviet famines of the 1930s. To a large extent, the geographical distribution of famine severity in the USSR can be attributed to similar factors. The areas that suffered most were the main Soviet “bread

baskets”—Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and the Volga region. Kazakhstan is only a partial exception. However, for a more complete picture, two additional and crucial factors must be included: first, the importance of the national question in Ukraine, or, more precisely, the Stalinist leadership’s anti-Ukrainian turn in the second half of 1932, which caused a manifold increase in the deadliness of the famine in the republic; and second, the role of livestock in Soviet agricultural and, above all, food policies. This second factor was decisive in leading Kazakhstan into a deadly and generalized famine.

During the famine only the inhabitants of Moscow and Leningrad were fed consistently by the state’s rationing system for reasons linked to the stability of the regime. It is estimated that around one hundred million people in the USSR—approximately two-thirds of the total Soviet population—were undernourished during the first half of the 1930s (Wheatcroft 107).<sup>4</sup> According to estimates that are still contested, the Soviet famines at the beginning of the 1930s killed almost six million people, concentrated in Ukraine (more than half of the victims), Kazakhstan (a quarter of the victims), and in the North Caucasus.<sup>5</sup> Almost ninety percent of the total number of victims perished in these three regions. There were also hundreds of thousands of deaths in areas of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, particularly in the Volga region (above all in the Volga German ASSR) and in the Urals. Famine (malnutrition, hunger, and their connected epidemic diseases) killed more than a third of the USSR’s Kazakhs, at least a fifth of the Ukrainians, and hundreds of thousands of Russians.

The geography of the 1931-33 famine can be explained in part by the economic geography of food production and consumption as shaped during the last decades of the tsarist empire. With economic transformations and migrations, areas of the empire became increasingly differentiated as grain-export and grain-import regions. The population of the northern region of tsarist and Soviet territory, which comprised all of the main urban and industrial centres of the country, including Moscow and St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad, could not feed itself with grain produced in the region and depended on imports. Leningrad, Karelia, Belarus, and the

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<sup>4</sup> The last census (1926) before the famine counted 148.7 million inhabitants in the USSR.

<sup>5</sup> The most accurate estimates of the number of victims seem those that Robert W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft provide. They have calculated 5.7 million excess deaths during the famine years of 1930-33 (Davies and Wheatcroft 2004, 415).

Central Industrial Region (Moscow, Ivanovo, Nizhnii Novgorod) made up this macro-region. The second grain net importer macro-region was in the south—Central Asia (Kazakhstan excluded) and Transcaucasia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). In Central Asia the main agricultural crop was cotton, by far the state's most important economic resource produced in the region. The area cultivated in cotton greatly expanded during the First Five-Year Plan. The above two net consumer regions were counterbalanced by three grain net exporter macro-regions—the Southern (Ukraine and the North Caucasus), the Central (the Black Earth and Volga regions), and the Eastern (the Urals, Siberia, Kazakhstan, and, to a much lesser extent, the Russian Far East) (Wheatcroft 109-10; Davies and Wheatcroft 2004).

The epicentres of the Soviet famine were the net exporter macro-regions. This fits with the general pattern Garnaut identified for the GLF famine. However, in Ukraine at the end of 1932, a *second* famine was provoked by the state's repressive measures to subjugate the peasants. If to that point the famine in Ukraine had killed in the tens of thousands, a magnitude comparable to the worst-hit areas of the central net exporter macro-region, starting from the winter of 1932-33 the famine killed millions.

The process that led to the famine in Ukraine was a vicious cycle of heavy grain procurements and connected state violence against the peasantry—common to the USSR “grain baskets” of Ukraine and the Don, Kuban, and Volga regions—leading to active and passive resistance from the peasants and consequent further repressions by the state, including increased requisition quotas. The famine in Ukraine should be divided into two conceptually separated events—a famine caused by the harsh grain procurements of the 1931 harvest and the disruption of agricultural activity due to collectivization and deportations over the previous four years, and then, in 1932, the punitive famine magnified by state policies against the peasantry during procurements of that year's harvest (Graziosi 2007, 331-62). In 1931, driven by the drought that hit northern Kazakhstan and Western Siberia, the state requisitioned forty-two percent of the harvest in Ukraine, a measure that by itself provoked huge problems in agricultural production because peasants were obliged to feed themselves with seed reserves set aside for the next sowing campaign (Werth 117-18).

The vicious circle of unbearable procurement quotas and active and passive peasant resistance led Stalin to develop what Terry Martin called the “national interpretation” of Ukrainian peasant resistance to Bolshevik agrarian policies. According to Stalin, peasants, the “reserve army” of any nationalist movement in agrarian societies, were resisting the will of the state to extract grain because of their Ukrainian nationalism. This resistance amounted to an “objective” attempt to undermine Soviet

industrializing efforts and, therefore, put into jeopardy the very existence of the Soviet state, threatened by military confrontations in both Europe and Asia. This interpretation was then extended to other areas: the Kuban with its large Ukrainian and Cossack populations (Cossacks had been labeled, albeit not consistently, as an enemy group during the Civil War), and, to a lesser extent, Belarus (Martin 273-308; Alekseenko).

Starting in November 1932, Moscow's plenipotentiary envoys (Molotov and Kaganovich made trips to Ukraine) adopted deadly measures, including prohibition of deliveries of any kind of goods to villages that failed to fulfil grain-delivery quotas.<sup>6</sup> For many villages this measure was tantamount to a death sentence. Kaganovich increased the grain requisitions, including seed reserves, starting in late December. The state therefore decided to use the already existing famine provoked by grain procurements concentrated in the Soviet "grain baskets" to subdue the Ukrainian peasantry. This decision, most probably taken in Moscow in mid-November, magnified the disaster and sentenced to death millions of Ukrainian peasants and increased the ongoing mass flight from the countryside to the cities and other Soviet republics.<sup>7</sup> According to Kul'chyts'kyi's estimates, before the autumn of 1932 the famine's victims in Ukraine numbered approximately 150,000; and from then on through the harvest of 1933 the famine claimed more than three million victims (Kul'chyts'kyi 196). In January 1933 the Stalinist leadership decided to criminalize the attempts of famine refugees to migrate because of the need for manpower in the countryside. On 22 January a secret directive signed by Stalin ordered the end of the flight of peasants from Ukraine and the Kuban. Two months later 225,000 people on the move had been arrested; eighty-five percent of them were sent back to their places of origin, and the remainder were exiled to special settlements or imprisoned in the Gulag (Werth 126-27). Some members of the Ukrainian Communist elite were accused of defending the peasants against the state and of connivance in their resistance. In December 1932 the Politburo in Moscow approved two secret decrees that overturned for Ukraine, and only for Ukraine, the official nationalities policies that had been instituted ten years earlier. Moscow refused to help the hardest-hit areas until the spring of 1933, when grain was sent in order to secure the following harvest.

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<sup>6</sup> On the role of Molotov and Kaganovich, see: Vasyli'iev and Shapoval.

<sup>7</sup> The best existing study on rural exodus during the 1930s is Kessler's.

The famine was not used to kill as many Ukrainians as possible but as a weapon to subdue the Ukrainian peasantry at the cost of its partial extermination. It was only in Ukraine that all the factors were present that would lead the Kremlin to turn famine into a weapon: Ukraine was the Soviet republic where indigenization (Ukrainization) of the local administration had been most successful; it had a recent but strong nationalist tradition along with a solid tradition of peasant resistance during the wars of 1917-21; and it was a borderland close to military and political threats from abroad. The other main “grain baskets” were far from borders, were “less indigenized,” and nationalist and peasant resistance there had weaker roots. The Russian Far East, bordering on Japanese-occupied Manchuria, was scarcely populated and a marginal grain producer. Ukraine was the only Soviet region that fulfilled all of the preconditions.

#### THE FAMINE IN KAZAKHSTAN

The most important difference between Ukraine and Kazakhstan is that in Kazakhstan the state did not use famine as a weapon to force peasants to work on collective farms and deliver their grain reserves. Secondly, Kazakhstan was much less important in terms of grain procurements than Ukraine, which was the USSR’s granary and therefore the centre of the battle between the Soviet state and the peasants. Thirdly, while Ukrainian attempts at creating an independent state after the collapse of the tsarist empire had been a serious military and political threat for the Bolsheviks, the Kazakh Alash Orda movement was never a major military force. Later, during the 1920s, national Communism was stronger in Ukraine than in any other republic in the USSR, and, as previously noted, Ukraine was the Soviet republic where indigenization policies were applied with the most zeal and success (Martin 75-181). Lastly, Ukraine was the most critical territory in the USSR geopolitically, along with the Russian Far East. The republic would have been at the forefront of a war against Germany or Poland (the signing of the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Poland in July 1932 did not change this structural condition). For all of these reasons, Stalin wrote to Kaganovich in his often quoted letter of 11 August 1932 that Ukraine was “the main question,” that the Party, the state, and even political police organs of the republic were infested by nationalist agents and Polish spies, and that Moscow was running a real risk to “lose Ukraine” (Khlevniuk 2001, 273).

These factors were either not present or of not nearly comparable importance in Kazakhstan. The state apparatus was not heavily indigenized. In early 1925 the presence of Kazakhs in the republic’s highest state

institutions was 8.3 percent; by the eve of the famine it had increased, but the Kazakhs remained strongly under-represented in state apparatuses (Pianciola 2009, 265-69). In that republic, nationalism was much weaker than in Ukraine. Moreover, in 1928 and 1929 the OGPU had arrested or already exiled nearly all Kazakh intellectuals who had created and directed the Alash-Orda nationalist party during the Civil War as well as those local Communists who did not support Kazakhstan's Party secretary, Filipp Goloshchekin, and Moscow's policies in the region. Finally, Kazakhstan only bordered on Xinjiang, a region that was not too worrisome for the Kremlin as a foreign threat. Even if some troubles in the region were attributed to the activities of Japanese spies, Japanese troops were much farther to the east. In December 1931 Stalin received a dossier of intercepted Japanese diplomatic and intelligence documents. An analysis by the OGPU between the end of the year and February 1932 led to the conclusion that the Japanese were aggressive in the Far East, but that they did not have an attack plan against the USSR and that there was no imminent threat of war.<sup>8</sup> In any case, Soviet troops eventually entered Xinjiang in January 1934, and the region became a de facto Soviet protectorate until 1941 (Millward 198-210).

Regarding the turn in Soviet nationalities policies implemented in Ukraine, Stalin replied in September 1933 to a letter from Levon Mirzoian, who had replaced Goloshchekin as the Party secretary in Kazakhstan, at the beginning of the year. Mirzoian had asked for approval not to implement changes in the republic's indigenization policies like the changes that had been imposed in Ukraine. Stalin gave his approval, replying that it was not necessary to modify the ongoing policies because the risk factors in Kazakhstan and Ukraine were different. The main difference was Kazakhstan's geopolitical position. Stalin wrote: "It is more difficult for Kazakh nationalism to connect with international interventionism than in Ukraine."<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, famine hit the Kazakhs even more harshly than the Ukrainians. The crucial factor to understand is that Kazakhstan was one of the few regions of the USSR (and by far the most important among them) where the population in the countryside was divided between groups of net

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<sup>8</sup> RGASPI, 558/11/185/1-9, OGPU report to Stalin on the risk of war with Japan, February 1932. Kuromiya has emphasized instead Japan's military threat for the Soviet Union during the winter 1931-32 and connected it with Stalin's policies in Xinjiang. See Kuromiya 2008, 670.

<sup>9</sup> RGASPI, 558/11/48/64, Stalin to Mirzoian, 13 Dec. 1933, quoted in Martin 360.

grain-producers and net grain-consumers.<sup>10</sup> This division consistently overlapped with the division between agriculturalists and pastoralists and between Slavic peasants and Kazakhs. At the end of the 1920s a fourth of the Kazakhs tilled the land, but they did so almost entirely to subsist. Moreover, they were often integrated into villages where the majority were pastoralists who moved with their herds during the warm seasons. The divided character of steppe society at the beginning of the twentieth century had two consequences—one based in fact and the other in the perceptions of the government about the region's economy. The first was that pastoralists, especially after the massive in-migration of Slavic peasant settlers from 1891 to World War I, depended on exchanges with the peasants more than the other way around (grain was a significant component of the pastoralists' diet). In specific areas of Soviet Kazakhstan, especially the Alma-Ata region in the southeast and patches of steppe in the north, pastoralists had been evicted from productive pastures to make way for the new arrivals from Russia and Ukraine. The second consequence was that the Kremlin saw Kazakhstan as a "dual space"—on one hand, a "backward" society of herders still not controlled by state institutions (Kazakhs were largely exempted from taxation during the NEP, and until 1928 they were not drafted into the Red Army) and of low productive use for the state's economic goals; and, on the other hand, an agricultural frontier society where grain production could be expanded. These two factors are crucial for understanding why the Kazakhs were the main victims of the 1931-33 pan-Soviet famine.

The formation of an agro-pastoral interdependent society in the Steppe is just the first precondition to understanding the famine. The second medium-term precondition is the "continuum of crises," to borrow Peter Holquist's expression, that hit the Steppe, from the World War I requisitions of livestock and yurts and the 1916 anti-colonial revolt to the imposition of Bolshevik power from 1920 to 1922 (in some areas of present-day Kazakhstan this entailed the most radical anti-colonial reforms ever implemented in the nascent USSR, especially in Semirech'e/Zhetysu in 1921 and 1922). This period was not only characterized by episodes of extreme violence (the repression of the 1916 revolt was in some regions a truly indiscriminate massacre of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz by tsarist troops and Slavic settlers in late 1916 and 1917). It was also accompanied by regional

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<sup>10</sup> Northern Kirgizia (present-day Kyrgyzstan) was in a similar situation in this respect, but other factors saved the Soviet republic from the famine. See below.

destructive famines, especially in Semirech'e in 1917 and in the northwestern Steppe in 1921 and 1922. The period left the Kazakhs much poorer in terms of livestock, i.e., in terms of economic and alimentary resources that could have been mobilized in the event of crises. As a consequence, in the 1920s their transhumance routes were much shorter than before the war. According to Kazakhstan's Main Statistical Directorate, in the mid-1920s only 17.2 percent of Kazakh households moved farther than fifty versts (53.34 km) during their annual transhumance. Nearly a quarter (24.5 percent) of the Kazakhs did not move at all, while over a third (34 percent) moved less than ten versts (10.67 km) from their winter villages with their herds.<sup>11</sup> Drought and *dzhut*—the freezing of pastures in the spring—provoked localized famines in the Adai region (Mangyshlak Peninsula) already in 1928, on the eve of the traumas of the “Great Turn.” Finally, the short-term causes of the famine were the forceful and massive grain and livestock procurements that started with the Stalinist demise of the NEP in the winter of 1927-28 (violent procurements began in the Steppe in January 1928) and continued for five years.

In different areas of the USSR localized famine conditions started to appear in the summer of 1930, before the harvest, as a consequence of procurements and the disruptions brought about by collectivization. In Siberia the OGPU reported to Stalin that peasants ate animal carcasses and that “a series of attempted suicides due to starvation (*na pochve goloda*) has been noticed” (quoted in Papkov 65).<sup>12</sup> Kazakhstan was no exception (Pianciola 2009, 366-67), but a generalized famine that continued *after* the annual harvest hit only in 1931. The Kazakhstan Statistical Directorate estimated a slight increase in the republic's population in 1930—from 6,688,200 in January 1930 to 6,706,500 in January 1931—but the rural population had already started to decline, from 6,086,800 in January 1930 to 5,973,800 in January 1931. In 1931 and 1932 the republic's total population collapsed by 1.8 million. The rural population plunged by 2.3 million (a 38.5 percent decrease), while the urban population increased by sixty percent to 0.44 million—from about ten percent to about twenty-five of the total population. According to the statistical directorate, the population stabilized in 1933, when an increase of almost 170,000 people was estimated, almost evenly divided between the rural and urban inhabitants (with a slight rural preponderance).

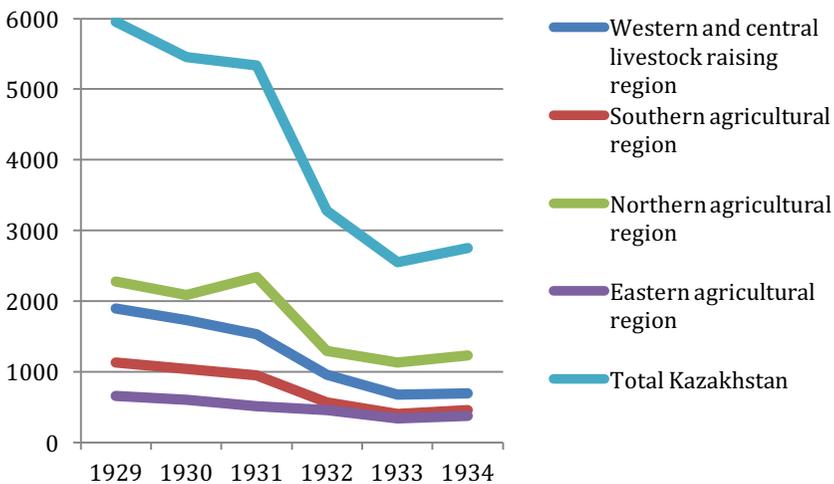
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<sup>11</sup> GARF, A-374/16/88/44 (1926).

<sup>12</sup> Papkov quotes reports coming from the Novosibirsk, Omsk, and Barnaul regions.

The geographical distribution of the famine victims in Kazakhstan has yet to be studied systematically. The republic had a strong internal regional specialization: the grain-producing regions were in northern and eastern Kazakhstan. In the south, rice and cotton were cultivated in the Syr-Dar'ia Valley. Chart 1 (below) shows the dynamics of the rural population (except those working in state farms, the number of whom were negligible until 1932 but had grown to 8.2 percent in 1933).

Chart 1. Peasants and herders in Kazakhstan, 1929-34 (in 1,000s, estimated for January of each year).



Source: GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), 6985/1/16/71, Kazakhstan Statistical Directorate (KazUNChU), "Dinamika naseleniia po zonam KASSR za 1929-1934" (1934). The table in the archival document refers to the "peasant sector," i.e., it excludes not only the urban population but also state farmers (1.3% of the total rural population in 1931, 5.8% in 1932, and 8.2% in 1933). Total sums for Kazakhstan have been adjusted when (in two cases) the regional data did not add up. A clear error in the data about the Northern Agricultural Region in 1931 in the original table ("3,143,085") has been adjusted on the basis of the total population in Kazakhstan in that year.

The chart is based on data that the Kazakhstan Statistical Directorate provided to the government commission headed by Aleksei Kiselev, which in 1934 investigated the consequences of collectivization, famine, and the

sedentarization of the Kazakhs in the republic.<sup>13</sup> The data are surely imprecise, and it is not clear how the directorate produced those estimates. The numbers for the rural population seem to be too low in all of Kazakhstan's regions. However, they were the best demographic data at the disposal of the 1934 government commission. Particularly interesting is that they link internal demographic trends to economic regions that crossed existing administrative boundaries.

Assuming that the margin of error is comparable for the different regions, a number of points are evident from the chart. First, 1931 was by far the worst year of the famine in Kazakhstan's countryside. Second, the Northern Agricultural Region experienced an increase in population during 1930 owing to two factors: surely the arrival of deported peasants from Russia, and probably the arrival of a wave of herders moving into that grain-growing region from the purely pastoral regions. Complementarily, the Livestock Breeding Region experienced the sharpest decline during 1930 (although it was relatively mild in comparison with subsequent years). Third, the Northern Agricultural Region was also the one that experienced the sharpest collapse in 1931, probably because the region was both one of the most productive regions in Kazakhstan (and therefore especially targeted to deliver state procurements) and the closest to the Soviet capital and Russian industrial regions, the final destinations of most of the requisitioned livestock. Railway lines that made easier the transportation of procured goods out of Kazakhstan crossed northern Kazakhstan: the Trans-Siberian Railway bordered on the republic and even crossed a few districts inside it; the Orenburg-Tashkent Railway crossed the Steppe from the northwest to the south. Data about the decrease in livestock in western Kazakhstan in districts traversed by the Orenburg-Tashkent Railway seem to confirm that the districts crossed by railway lines suffered disproportionately.<sup>14</sup> The fourth and final point the chart shows is that a tenuous recovery had begun already with the harvest of 1933 (the data for 1934 really refers to the end of 1933). The low demographic decrease in the smallest of the four regions, the Eastern Agricultural Region, is explained by the fact that the region was made up of thirteen border districts, where procurements were relatively limited to avoid provoking mass population flight across the border into Xinjiang. The

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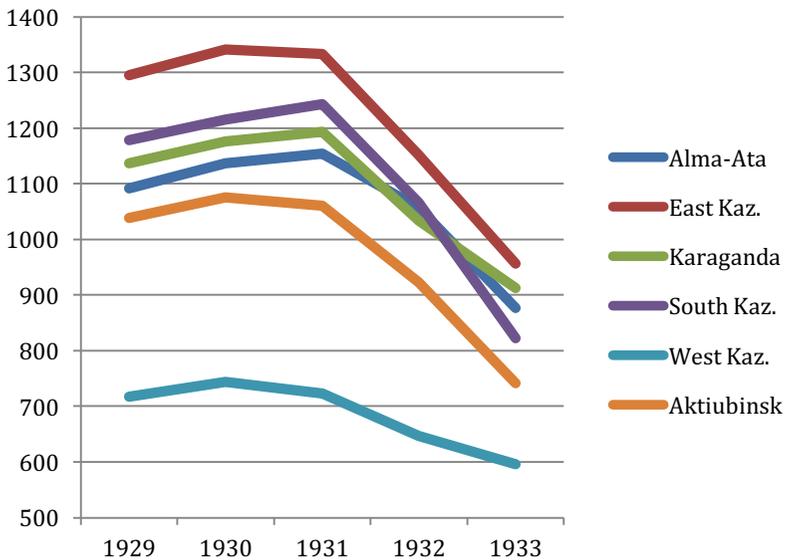
<sup>13</sup> The official mandate of the commission was to assess sedentarization. For more information on the commission's reports, see. Pianciola 2009, 26-28.

<sup>14</sup> State Archive of Kyzylorda Oblast (GAKOO), R-120/1/40/1, Doklad ob Aral'skom raione (1931).

districts of the main urban centres of Eastern Kazakhstan (and of the republic in its entirety), Semipalatinsk and Alma-Ata, were included respectively in the Northern and Southern Agricultural Regions.

These data should be compared with the demographic data by administrative unit in Chart 2 (below). Kazakhstan underwent a series of administrative reshuffles that significantly changed the shape of the main administrative units in the 1920s and early 1930s. The main point to keep in mind in comparing the data in both charts is that Eastern Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Western Kazakhstan, and Aktiubinsk oblasts all had an oblong north-south shape (see Map of Kazakhstan), and each therefore included a mainly agricultural area in the north and a mainly livestock-breeding area in the south. In other words, together they formed most of the Northern Agricultural and Western and Central Livestock Breeding Regions. The data in Chart 2, unlike in Chart 1, also include the urban population and workers in state farms.

Chart 2. Total population by administrative unit (oblast) in Kazakhstan, 1929-33 (in 1,000s, estimated for January of each year).



Source: GARF, 6985/1/16/75: KazUNChU, "Chislennost' naseleniia KazASSR po oblastiam za 1929-32 [sic]" (1934).

The main difference in the picture that emerges from the two charts is that in the second chart the difference between 1931 and 1932 is less sharp

in terms of demographic collapse. The only oblasts where the decline was still clearly worse in 1931, even taking into account the urban population, are Karaganda and Western Kazakhstan. This difference between the two charts can be explained by the hypothesis that some who abandoned the countryside in 1931 ended up in Kazakhstan's towns. In 1932 these refugees died or fled from the Soviet republic.

To understand the famine in Kazakhstan, the Stalinist "Great Turn" and the total collectivization drive (and magniloquent plans for the rapid sedentarization and transition of the Kazakhs "from nomadism to socialism") are less important than the two different phases of forced state procurements. The first, personally triggered by Stalin (who summoned the Kazakhstan regional administrators during his Siberian trip in January 1928), lasted from early 1928 to the summer of 1930. During this phase, grain procurements were central for the USSR as a whole. Kazakhstan was no exception, and its herders bore a disproportionate weight in the procurements. These pastoralists were forced to sell or barter their animals in order to come up with the grain to be delivered to the state. The republic's district administrations knew perfectly well that the Kazakhs consumed grain in significant quantities and that between a quarter and a third of Kazakh families also cultivated grain. Therefore, the administrations forcibly steered the existing agro-pastoral system of economic exchange in a direction that was advantageous to the state. Grain procurements were the focus of the state's attention during this phase. It is telling that at a meeting of the Party district secretaries of Syr-Dar'ia Okrug (in Southern Kazakhstan) in August 1928, livestock was only mentioned in relation to procurements of wool and hides. Also in an area like the Syr-Dar'ia Valley, which was of secondary importance for grain procurements, administrative pressure from above focused on wheat and other grains. Until 1929 state procurements had to compete with the market, especially near major urban centres. In 1928, of the 200,000 poods of grain that Tashkzak District (close to the border with Uzbekistan and its capital Tashkent) was to deliver, the state procurement agencies got a mere 5,000 poods, while 60,000 to 80,000 poods ended up in Tashkent's markets.<sup>15</sup> These difficulties were overcome by outlawing rural market exchanges, arresting intermediaries, and launching the total collectivization drive in the winter of 1929-30. Between 1928 and 1930, grain procurements

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<sup>15</sup> Branch of the State Archive of Kyzylorda Oblast (hereafter FGAKOO), 5/2/23, "Soveshchanie sekretarei raionnykh komitetov VKP(b) Syr-Darynskogo okruga. Sekretno" (13-15 August 1928).

targeting Kazakh herders played an important role in their impoverishment and in pushing the Kazakh population close to the subsistence line (see Pianciola 2009, 362-66, 387-91).

The second phase in state procurement policies started in the summer of 1930 and went on for two years until the summer of 1932. This phase pushed millions of Kazakhs below the subsistence line and into the Great Famine.<sup>16</sup> In the summer of 1930, the Politburo in Moscow decided to concentrate its livestock procurement efforts in Kazakhstan and the North Caucasus, both in terms of live animals and meat. The decision was taken on 15 July 1930, and it was triggered by the deep crisis into which collectivization had plunged the country. Peasants had slaughtered, sold, or bartered livestock to avoid its requisition and collectivization.<sup>17</sup> The additional effort in livestock procurements did not mean that grain procurements became less systematic, but a certain amount of grain was set apart to compensate the pastoralists. On the basis of the Politburo's 15 July decision, Kazakhstan had to provide 18.4 percent of total Soviet meat and livestock procurements for the 1930-31 economic year, even though the republic's share of the USSR's total number of livestock was only 11.9 percent in the summer of 1930. To achieve the livestock and meat procurement quotas for the year, approximately a quarter of Kazakhstan's livestock in the summer of 1930 had to be requisitioned.

Eventually more than half of the livestock present in Kazakhstan in mid-1930 was requisitioned and slaughtered, or exported outside the Soviet republic, or died in the epidemics that killed animals concentrated in the newly formed giant livestock collective and state farms. A number of economic institutions built in Kazakhstan during the First Five-Year Plan contributed to the slaughtering. Mines and factories were responsible for feeding their labour forces, and the organizing of local procurements uncontrolled by the centre took a toll on the republic's livestock numbers. In January 1931 Anastas Mikoian, the USSR's people's commissar for supply and Stalin's man in charge of procurements for cities and factories, came to Kazakhstan to put pressure on its administration to increase procurements. Reports about a generalized famine among the Kazakhs started reaching

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<sup>16</sup> In this and the following paragraph, I am summarizing what I explain more extensively in my forthcoming article "Sacrificing the Kazakhs."

<sup>17</sup> Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (hereafter RGASPI), 17/3/789/12ob; and State Archive of Kyzylorda Oblast (hereafter GAKOO), R-5/2/431/34-37, "Sekretno: Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) o skotozagotovkakh i miasosnabzhenii ot 15.07.1930."

Moscow in the late summer of 1931. Nonetheless livestock and grain procurements continued into 1932.

Kazakhstan was used as a reserve to feed the populations of Moscow and Leningrad, the centres of support for the Bolshevik regime and two of the main industrial areas of the USSR. Approximately half of the meat imported into Moscow, Leningrad, and their oblasts in February and March 1931 (the beginning of the year was the height of livestock procurements) came from Kazakhstan. According to the plan, of the livestock (more than eighty percent of the procurement plan) and meat exported from Kazakhstan in the second half of 1931, 46.8 percent was to be sent to Moscow and 43.6 percent, to Leningrad.<sup>18</sup> Kazakhstan and the Kazakhs were sacrificed in order to feed the social groups at the top of the Stalinist “hierarchy of consumption” (Osokina).

This second phase lasted until the summer of 1932, when Moscow acknowledged that livestock in the Kazakh Steppe had nearly disappeared. From approximately forty million head of livestock (all species) in Kazakhstan in 1928, their number had plunged to 5.26 million by June 1932. On 17 September 1932 the Kremlin officially stopped livestock requisitions in Kazakhstan, freed the surviving herders from taxes, and authorized personal ownership of a number of animals of different species. In the meantime, 1.3 to 1.5 million Kazakhs had died (slightly more than a third of the population), and hundreds of thousands had fled from the republic to survive. The return of Kazakh famine refugees to the republic continued until the end of the 1930s. The surviving Kazakhs were bereft of livestock—their main wealth and means of subsistence—and the famine had made them totally dependent on the Soviet state for survival. The administration settled them in industrial and agricultural jobs. Some returned to a state-controlled form of pastoralism in the framework of the collective-farm system. In terms of the distance of their transhumance, their practices were not too different from the 1920s (the disappearance of most of the livestock made longer pastoral trips unnecessary.) The post-September 1932 relaxation—part of a general turn in 1932 that historians have characterized as a “neo-NEP” (Khlevniuk 2009, 45-46)—lasted until the end of the decade, when a second wave of “socialization” (i.e., state

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<sup>18</sup> Central State Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hereafter TsGARK), 264/1/461/259, “[Kazakhstanskomu] Kraikomu: otgruzki miasoproduktov po kazakhstanskoi kontore ‘Soiuzmiaso’” (November 1931); TsGARK, 264/1/461/261, “Svedeniia vypolneniia plana zaboia i otgruzok skotomiasoproduktov proletarskim tsentram za IV kvartala po kraevoi kontore ‘Soiuzmiaso,’ 03.12.1931.

requisition) of livestock was imposed. The very relative liberalization in livestock ownership that started in 1932 was in fact extended and regulated by the Kolkhoz Model Statute of February 1935. This led to an increase in livestock that officially reached 159.3 million head in 1940 in the entire USSR, almost the number in 1930 (but with frontiers extended after the Soviet annexations of the Baltic states, eastern Poland, and Moldova) (Karnaukhova 100).

#### UPRISINGS, PROCUREMENTS, AND THE FAMINE

The Politburo's decision in the summer of 1930 to use Kazakhstan and the Kazakhs as a livestock and meat reserve for the Soviet capitals was primarily caused by the deep crisis in the meat supply for cities and industries. The choice to concentrate livestock and meat procurements in Kazakhstan and the North Caucasus seems to have been driven by pragmatism: they were two large pastoral areas and relatively well connected by railway to Central Russia. However, two related and additional factors may have played a role. The first is the idea that much more livestock was present in Kazakhstan than what existing state statistics reported. During his trip to Kazakhstan, Anastas Mikoian explicitly made this point in a telegram he sent to Stalin from Alma-Ata in January 1931. The second factor is that these areas, along with Ukraine, were perceived as particularly insubordinate to the new order in the Soviet countryside. To illustrate this point, let me turn to a specific source, the "thematic folders" the Politburo used when making its decisions.

Our understanding of the political decisions Stalin and his inner circle took is limited by the lack of access to crucial documentation. The situation has not radically changed: several years ago Khlevniuk pointed out that "most of the original background materials associated with Politburo decisions are not yet available to researchers" (Khlevniuk 2009, xxii). The archival Politburo materials were most often organized into thematic folders (*tematicheskie papki*), "with files containing copies of Politburo decisions, background materials pertaining to the decisions, and informational sources (for example, secret police reports) related to particular issues" (Khlevniuk 2009, xxii). These "subject-specific folders of documents... were submitted to the Politburo and Stalin; they comprise the main historical component of the Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation (APRF)" (Khlevniuk 2015, 332). The APRF is still closed to researchers except for a handful of historians. However, over the last few years a certain number of files have been transferred to the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI, the former CPSU archive containing documents up to the early 1950s) and the Russian State Archive

of Contemporary History (RGANI, the former archive of the Central Committee of the CPSU). A series of thematic Politburo folders concerning policies towards the countryside were recently transferred from the APRF to the RGANI. The files that are accessible (many files in the inventory are still classified) focus especially on the economic difficulties in the newly created collective-farm system, mass peasant deportations, and, overwhelmingly for the first half of 1930, on the vast wave of revolts against collectivization and requisitions in the countryside.<sup>19</sup>

Since the 1990s, historians have underscored that “national republics and Russian regions with large ethnic minorities tended to have some of the largest rebellions, followed closely by the grain-producing and black soil regions” (Viola 141). According to data published by Viola, in nine Soviet regions more than five hundred rebellions broke out in 1930: in Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the Central Black Earth, Lower Volga, Middle Volga, and Moscow Regions, Siberia, Tataria (present-day Tatarstan), and Belarus (Viola 140). Ukraine kept Stalin and the Politburo constantly worried until the famine broke because of both the active and passive resistance of peasants to the new regime in the Ukrainian countryside (see Graziosi 1994 and 1996). In the accessible Politburo “thematic folders” devoted to anti-collectivization peasant uprisings in the USSR during the spring of 1930, the North Caucasus and Kazakhstan are by far the pre-eminent regions. In particular, the folders show that Kazakhstan, where the relatively low number of 266 revolts took place in 1930, was getting a disproportionate degree of attention from the Politburo. This was probably due to a perceived low level of control of the territory by the Red Army and OGPU, which made suppressing the revolts particularly difficult. A report from Alma-Ata in the spring of 1930 pointed out that “the struggle against banditism is made difficult by the absence, in Kazakhstan, of regular Red Army units. The promised creation of OGPU divisions in the *okrugs* of Syr-Dar’ia, Aktiubinsk, and Kustanai [the three regions were peasant and herder rebellions were most widespread] so far has not been implemented.... We ask that the formation of regular territorial units in Kazakhstan be sped up.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The materials in the RGANI are preserved in fond 3 (Politburo), *opis'* 30 (Agriculture). Of the inventory's materials, at least twenty-three files (nos. 166-88) concerning the first half of the 1930s are still inaccessible to researchers. It is likely that these files contain material on what information the Politburo had during the famine.

<sup>20</sup> RGANI, 3/30/165/109-110, “Kazakkraikom (Roshal') iz Alma-Aty: Sovershenno

For this reason, the suppression of uprisings in the countryside was often relegated to “Communist detachments” composed of urban civilians with low combat readiness and meagre military training. Eventually the insurgencies were put down with the help of Red Army and OGPU units brought in from other regions. In addition, groups of hundreds of rebellious peasants and herders, moving with their families and poorly armed, were exterminated with the use of airplanes.<sup>21</sup> The six-hundred-strong Kazakh Cavalry Battalion, the only regular Red Army unit employing Kazakhs during the “Great Turn,” also took part in the conflicts. Major revolts that resumed in the first half of 1931 (the biggest took place in the Adai region in Western Kazakhstan) were extinguished by the famine.

Most probably the perception of the region and its Kazakh population as rebellious and alienated from the state, misgivings about the information that state institutions had about the region (overestimation of the quantity of livestock), and the perceived low economic usefulness of the Kazakh “nomads” all played a role in the decision to funnel economic resources out of the region. The 1930-31 livestock procurement plan that was approved in the summer of 1930 targeted primarily Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the North Caucasus, which together had to provide almost half of the total Soviet procurement plan.

#### COLLECTIVIZATION AND SEDENTARIZATION OF THE KYRGYZ

No other Inner Asian pastoral region experienced either a famine or a famine of comparable magnitude. The other main pastoral region in Soviet Central Asia was Kirgizia (present-day Kyrgyzstan). The Kyrgyz situation is particularly important for a comparison with Kazakhstan because the region had many common characteristics: before World War I a significant Slavic peasant in-migration (and a consequent expansion of grain production) had taken place in the north, in the region around the capital Pishpek (renamed Frunze in 1926, and now Bishkek), and Lake Issyk-Kul. Kyrgyz pastoralism had much in common with Kazakh mountain

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sekretno. Moskva TsK VKP Stalinu, po priamomu provodu cherez otvetstvennogo dezhurnogo PPOGPU: S sobliudeniem strozhaishei konspiratsii” No date [March-April 1930].

<sup>21</sup> For a report of a Soviet airplane machine-gunning down a group of 400 people near Taldy-Kurgan (Alma-Ata Region) in March 1930, cf. RGANI, 3/30/165/82, “Zapiska po priamomu provodu iz Alma-Aty—Moskva, OGPU, tov. Messing, 30.03.1930.”

pastoralism in the south and east. Sedentarization plans, very similar to those implemented in Kazakhstan both in their design and failures, were implemented at the beginning of the 1930s. After the Soviet railway network reached Pishpek/Frunze in the mid-1920s, it became possible to quickly export requisitioned goods from the republic.

The most important factor to explain the absence of famine in Kirgizia was that meat and livestock procurement plans were decisively less onerous than in Kazakhstan. Kirgizia had a higher livestock-to-population ratio than Kazakhstan to start with (in 1929 there were 7.2 head of livestock per person in Kirgizia, versus six head per person in Kazakhstan). In 1929 and 1930 meat and livestock procurements amounted respectively to two and five percent of livestock in Kirgizia. In the meantime, their number had decreased by a third between 1929 and 1930 because of the chaos caused by collectivization. In the framework of the extraordinary measures the Politburo took in July 1930, when the Kremlin decreed the requisition of a quarter of Kazakhstan's livestock, procurement plans for Kirgizia were also significantly increased to 62,000 tonnes of "live weight," later marginally adjusted to 60,500 tonnes. However, this meant that in 1931 approximately only 13.6 percent of Kyrgyz livestock was to be requisitioned—a significant quantity, but half of Kazakhstan's procurement targets. Nonetheless this led to the collapse of Kyrgyz livestock from 4.4 million to 2.4 million head. For this reason, vastly reduced procurements in 1932 (in absolute terms, 63.6 percent of the previous year's procurements) translated into an increase in relative terms, up to 15.8 percent of total livestock. The number of animals continued to plummet, falling to 1.6 million in 1933. But at this point, following decisions taken in the summer of 1932, the Kremlin had stopped significant meat and livestock procurements: In 1933 the state requisitioned 0.9 percent of the livestock in Kirgizia, and fewer the following year.<sup>22</sup>

Kyrgyz historians have pointed out that there were areas in the republic that did in fact suffer a demographic crisis during the first half of the 1930s. However, Batyrbaeva recently showed that of the five oblasts forming Kirgizia, only in the oblast of the republic's capital, Frunze, did the Kyrgyz population slightly decrease (1.9 percent) between the two censuses of 1926 and 1939. Considering that the capital was an area of attraction for internal migrants and a population increase would therefore

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<sup>22</sup> Data from GARF, 6985/1/4/34, 45, "S. Takoev, diagrammy (dinamika skotam po vidam, dinamika zagotovok)," 1934.

be expected, Batyrbaeva concludes that there was indeed a localized famine in the capital's region that affected ethnic Kyrgyz above all. In three other oblasts of the republic, the inter-census increase of the Kyrgyz population was between 11.1 and 19.8 percent. According to Batyrbaeva, as a result of both between increased mortality and decreased natality the demographic loss was approximately forty thousand persons among the Kyrgyz, seventy-eight percent of them in Frunze Oblast and eighteen percent in Issyk-Kul Oblast (i.e., the two regions that had an agricultural and a pastoral economy and where Slavic settlers were concentrated). According to the Kyrgyz historian, the direct victims of the famine in 1932 and 1933 were 25,800 Kyrgyz (less than four percent of the total Kyrgyz population) (Batyrbaeva 222-24). The magnitude of demographic loss was incomparably smaller than the mass deaths of Kazakhs at the time. It is also telling that the losses were concentrated around Frunze (see Loring, who confirms this circumstance). This suggests that the main cause was likely republican procurements, aimed at feeding the local urban population, rather than Soviet centralized requisitions forcing export from the Soviet republic.

No intrinsic economic reason can explain the Stalinist leadership's different treatment of Kazakhstan and Kirgizia. In order to understand Stalinist policies in this period, it is important to bear in mind the *economic* districts of the USSR often overlooked by historians, who focus too much on Soviet national republics as units of analysis. The Kremlin officially defined and used the economic districts for planning purposes, organizing procurement targets, and determining economic relations between the centre and the periphery. Kazakhstan constituted a separate economic district. Kirgizia, even if it was an autonomous republic within the Russian SFSR until 1936, was instead part of the Central Asian Economic District, governed by the Central Asian Bureau of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. In other words, unlike Kazakhstan, the heads of the Kyrgyz Communist Party were subjected to another Party administrative layer.

The main product that the Central Asian Economic District had to send to industries in the European USSR was cotton. For this reason, and in order to increase the land area tilled under cotton, Central Asia was considered a net consumer of grains. Cereals were regularly sent into Central Asia during the First Five-Year Plan, when the area under cotton cultivation significantly increased. No famine was recorded in the sedentary regions of Central Asia or in Turkmenistan. Central Asia was therefore marginal in the "struggle for grain" between the Kremlin and the Soviet peasantry, and this saved it from the famine. Kirgizia was divided by a pastoral and agricultural north (Pishpek/Frunze Oblast, where the herders were Kyrgyz and the peasants were mostly Russian and Ukrainian grain-growers), and a pastoral and agricultural south (the Fergana Valley, where the herders were Kyrgyz

and the peasants were mostly Uzbek). What probably saved the Kyrgyz from the kind of devastating livestock requisitions that led to the Kazakh catastrophe was the fact that, with the “national division” of Central Asia in 1924, a few cotton-producing districts in the Fergana Valley had ended up in Kirgizia. This led to the inclusion of Kirgizia in the cotton-producing Central Asian economic district, rather than in the grain-producing and livestock-breeding economic district centred in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Kirgizia was not subject to vast agricultural colonization plans during collectivization, unlike Kazakhstan, where the influx of hundreds of thousands of deported peasants increased the local demand for grain. Finally, Kirgizia, unlike Kazakhstan, was not an area in which numerous industrial and mining projects were launched during the First Five-Year Plan. In Kazakhstan such projects led to uncontrolled local procurements by various economic institutions and consequently to the food crisis in the countryside.

#### THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION: MONGOLIA AND XINJIANG IN THE 1930S

Soviet livestock policies had an impact on Inner Asian pastoralism not only within Soviet borders. They had, in fact, transnational ramifications, including on pastoralism and livestock breeding primarily in Mongolia and Xinjiang, the Inner Asian regions under direct Soviet control or Soviet influence. Like Kazakhstan, but to a much lesser degree, the two regions became significant sources of livestock after the mass slaughter of Soviet animals triggered by collectivization in 1930.

The USSR imported livestock from abroad between 1929 and 1934. The main increase in imports, unsurprisingly, was in 1931 and was especially concentrated in Xinjiang and Mongolia. Unlike Mongolia, Xinjiang was never directly controlled by the USSR, but it was a Soviet protectorate between the early 1930s and 1941. Soviet troops entered the region in 1934 to put an end to the local civil war there. Moscow supported the local governor Sheng Shicai, who even became a member of the Bolshevik Party.

Mongolia, which until 1932 was by far the main source of Soviet livestock imports, was a de facto Soviet protectorate, exercised through Comintern envoys. The Red Army conquered the country towards the end of the Russian Civil War, and the Kazakh Communist Turar Ryskulov wrote its constitution and the statute of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (Babaar 261-71; Morozova 2002, 54-58). A Comintern report in 1931

claimed that in every Mongol state institution “today’s situation is such that everything, up to the smallest decision, is taken by the Soviet instructor... The Mongol worker has only to sign.”<sup>23</sup> Bookkeeping in Mongol economic institutions was conducted entirely in Russian; in the main economic institution in Mongolia, the Chief Office of Co-operation, there were more Soviet citizens than Mongols (45 and 39.2 percent respectively); and in the Ulaanbaatar co-operative organization, Mongols comprised only 37.2 percent of the members. Comintern representatives lamented that ministers of the Mongolian government abstained from signing any decree if they were not reassured that the Soviet plenipotentiary had approved it in advance. Consequently the Mongolian government did “not feel any [political] responsibility.”<sup>24</sup>

Socio-economic transformations in Mongolia in the period mirrored contemporary policies in the USSR, and specific policies were implemented almost simultaneously in both countries. This is common knowledge in the historiography (see Morozova 2009, 63-82), but few historians have noted the degree to which those were closely connected to the ones applied in Soviet pastoral regions. The expropriation and deportation of pastoral social elites in Mongolian society happened one year after identical measures (“debaization”) were taken in Kazakhstan. The size of the campaign was almost the same (689 households in Kazakhstan in 1928, approximately 700 in Mongolia in 1929),<sup>25</sup> and the measures taken were identical: expropriation, distribution of cattle among the poor, and deportation and exile inside the country of targeted rich herders together with their families.

The collectivization drive in Mongolia was launched at the same time as in the USSR, in 1930. At that time Buddhist monasteries owned a significant part of the country’s livestock—three million head (about fourteen percent of the total).<sup>26</sup> The monasteries were the country’s economic, social, and spiritual centres (there were no towns in Mongolia, with the partial exception of Ulaanbataar, which consisted largely of nomadic tents).

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<sup>23</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/120/79, “Doklada tov. Chernomorova,” 2 June 1931.

<sup>24</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/120/114, 117-118, 123, Comintern reports to Moscow, late 1931. The quote is on p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/94/85-96, “Tezisy o mongol'skoi ekonomike,” 1929.

<sup>26</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/120/172, “Sov. Sekretno: Ot Chernomordika M. B. (Ulan-Bator-Khoto) - Ispolkomu Kominternu, Vostsekretariatu,” 7 Jan. 1932. The livestock owned by the monasteries had already declined from 3.286 million head in 1929 to 3.035 million in 1930.

Buddhist monks were estimated at being a quarter of the male population in Mongolia. In the autumn of 1930 two-thirds of the Buddhist monasteries' livestock was confiscated for use as the initial capital of the collective farms: two million head were requisitioned; and in the late autumn and early winter, until January 1931, 1.6 million head were transferred to 612 collective farms, into which 42,701 Mongol households—about thirty percent of the country's population—were incorporated.<sup>27</sup> Part of the remaining livestock was allegedly distributed among non-collectivized poor herders, while part of it was exported to the USSR. Internal trade, monopolized by Chinese merchants, was wiped out during the spring of 1930, when four thousand Chinese merchants were expropriated.<sup>28</sup> Collectivization did not go much further. In August 1931, the Comintern counted seven hundred collective farms in Mongolia, comprising 46,000 households, or thirty-two percent of the population. Each of these farms had an average of about three hundred people.<sup>29</sup>

The main collectivization wave in Mongolia and the expropriation of the monasteries' livestock were contemporaneous to the great livestock and meat requisition drive in Kazakhstan that began in the summer of 1930. As the Comintern envoy, Moisei Chernomordik pointed out in June 1931, "Livestock procurements this year are being implemented on a scale not yet seen in Mongolia."<sup>30</sup> Procurements were instrumental for the export of livestock to the USSR: the plan for 1931 included 116,000 cattle and horses and 940,000 sheep and goats (but, as Table 1 below shows, eventually the quantity of livestock exported was lower).<sup>31</sup> This amount was about five to six percent of the total livestock in the country, the equivalent of a fifth of the meat and livestock procurement plan for Kazakhstan for the 1930-31 economic year. Livestock from Mongolia was sent to Moscow and Leningrad via the Trans-Siberian Railway.

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<sup>27</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/119/45, "Mongol'skaia Narodnaia Respublika na novom etape: Doklad tov. Kuchumova," 15 Feb. 1931.

<sup>28</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/119/46, "Mongol'skaia Narodnaia Respublika na novom etape: Doklad tov. Kuchumova," 15.02.1931. The government did not expel the Chinese from the country, however. In 1934, there were still around 10,000 registered Chinese citizens in Ulaanbaatar. See Morozova 2009, 95.

<sup>29</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/119/111, "Dokladnaia zapiska tov. Bulle," 3 Aug. 1931.

<sup>30</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/120/70, "Doklada tov. Chernomorova," 2 June 1931.

<sup>31</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/140/66, "Ministr trgovli i promyshlennosti, Sodnom, Ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska k importno-eksportnomu planu," early 1932.

The situation deteriorated significantly at the beginning of 1932. The export plan for that year elicited very strong resistance from Mongolian Party members,<sup>32</sup> particularly because widespread uprisings in the countryside had engulfed five of the country's thirteen *aimaks* (administrative regions). Reports directly linked the livestock procurements and the revolts. In Kosogol *aimak*, requisition plans targeted up to 31 percent of the cattle and horses and 13.8 percent of the smaller livestock. All of the livestock in the *aimak* was to be exported to the USSR.<sup>33</sup>

Table 1. Livestock imported into the USSR (in 1,000s), 1929-34.

Year	1929-30		1931		1932		1933		1934	
	horses cattle	sheep goats								
Mongolia	77.0	377.5	90.8	688.3	150	800	16.3	224.5	39.4	268.1
Tuva	3.3	5.2	2.2	4.5	8	15	2.3	21.9	1.9	13.8
Xinjiang	15.8	170.0	23.7	288.0	30	400	23.7	388.0	6.8	284.2
Afghanistan	17.4	66.9	8.9	50.0	12	100	--	--	--	--
Persia	29.1	32.1	17.6	74.9	70	300	6.0	102.2	5.4	158.0
Turkey	28.9	97.7	21.8	48.7	50	120	32.1	109.0	28.1	87.4
Total	171.0	748.4	164.8	1,155.0	320	1,735	80.3	848.7	81.6	811.6

Source: RGASPI, 84/1/6/13, 109, "Sravnitel'nye svedeniia po importu skota iz stran Vostoka" (25 Oct. 1932); "Sopostavlenie ob'ema importnykh operatsii v 1934 godu po otnosheniiu k 1933 g. (v golovakh)," 1934. The italicized data for 1932 are planned quantities; data for all other years are the quantity effectively imported. Tuva was formally independent from the USSR until 1944.

This led to an uprising in the province in which up to three thousand men in thirteen armed groups took part. The rebellion broke out in April and was put down only in October. Government army detachments lost 407 men in the combat, and the minister of trade and Industry, Gombyn Sodnom, was killed by the insurgents.<sup>34</sup> Reports from the Comintern and the Mongolian administration consistently attributed the virulence of the revolts to Japanese backing (the Japanese were allegedly providing arms to the

<sup>32</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/137/69-82, "Perevod s mongol'skogo: Sovershenno sekretno. Badarkho (sekretar' TSK MNPR) tovarishchi Piatnitskii i Mif [IKKI]," 11 Apr. 1932.

<sup>33</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/140/60, Zapiska iz aimaka Kosogol, early 1932.

<sup>34</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/140/81-81ob, Zapiska ob uchastnikakh mongol'skogo zapadnogo vosstaniia 1932 g. liudskikh poteriakh i material'nom ushcherba, ponasennykh v rezul'tata etogo vosstaniia.

insurgents from Manchuria).<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to say whether these allegations had a basis in truth, but they testify to the anxiety of having the Japanese army not far from the Mongolian border. Japan had invaded Manchuria in September 1931 and created a puppet “Manchu State” (Manchukuo) in February 1932.

In July 1932 an extraordinary plenum of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party explicitly invoked the Japanese threat as the main reason for the reversal of collectivization and even the postponement of the creation of a socialist economy in Mongolia. The plenum ruled that the possibility that Mongolia could become a “Japanese colony” and that an alliance between the external and internal (“class”) enemy made it advisable to postpone the “building of socialism” in the country. Invoking the “left excesses” of the current government, which had wrongly “copied the political and economic measures” implemented in the USSR (an advanced, industrial “socialist country where private ownership of the means of production had already been liquidated”), and euphemistically mentioning the “discontent” of the rural population, the plenum claimed that the new task of the Mongolian government should be the creation of a “new kind of democratic-bourgeois republic” and that the priority should now be consolidation of the state rather than social revolution and economic transformation. Concrete measures were adopted: the restoration of private trade, the “promotion of private initiative” in the economic sphere in general, and the “rehabilitation” of banks as credit institutions for private economic actors, “including the wealthy.” The plenum pledged “complete freedom with regard to religious beliefs” and launched a purge in the regional Party organizations of the four *aimaks* where uprisings were still in progress.<sup>36</sup> At least on paper, this was a retreat incomparably more radical than the spring 1930 temporary truce between the Soviet state and the peasantry or the contemporary (1932) “neo-NEP” in the USSR. The Kremlin’s order to implement this New Turn Policy arrived directly from Moscow on 10 June in a telegram to Andrei Okhtin, the Soviet plenipotentiary in the country (Morozova 2009, 79).

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<sup>35</sup> In addition to the report cited at the previous footnote, cf. also: RGASPI, 495/152/137/55-61, Badarkho (sekretar' TsK MNPR), tovarishchi Piatnitskii i Mif [IKKI], 13.05.1932; RGASPI, 495/152/140/7, Izvestiia po telefonu iz uliasutaia v TsK Revvoensovet, GVO, 26.03.1932

<sup>36</sup> RGASPI, 495/152/133/367-374, Postanovleniia chrezvichainogo plenuma TsK i TsKK MNRP, Ulaanbaatar, July 1932. Quotes from ll. 368ob, 370, 371, 371ob.

This retreat was an important factor in saving Mongol herders from starvation. No famine was recorded in Mongolia during the collectivization and extraction of pastoral resources from the population, and the loss of livestock there was much smaller than in Kazakhstan—approximately a third of the total. Various authors cite similar figures. In 1930 there were 23.5-24 million head of livestock in the country. When collectivization was stopped in the summer of 1932, 16-16.2 million head were left. The fact that two-thirds of the original livestock were still alive when collectivization was halted made a quick recovery possible under the New Turn Policy that began in 1932. By 1935 herd numbers had allegedly bounced back to 22.6 million (Endicott 68-70; Morozova 2009, 78). The fact that collectivization had stopped and Buddhist monks had not been wiped out, unlike rural elites in the USSR between 1917 and the early 1930s, can explain why Stalin's Great Terror was crueller proportionally in Mongolia than in the USSR. In 1937 and 1938 more than twenty thousand Mongols—about three percent of the population—were killed. The destruction of almost all Buddhist monasteries in the country was part of the Great Terror campaign. Full-scale collectivization only resumed in 1955, and it was proclaimed as achieved in 1959 after all herders and livestock had been incorporated into collectives (*negdels*) (Endicott 70-71).

The absence of famine in Mongolia still awaits systematic study. Several factors should be considered. (1) No significant European (Russian) or Chinese agricultural-settler population was present in Outer Mongolia, and the Mongol economy was therefore not an agricultural-pastoral complex. (2) The extraction of pastoral resources was difficult because of the absence of efficient communication lines: no railways or large rivers linked the country to the USSR, and only in 1938 was the first railway completed (just 42 km long) in Mongolia. (3) Most importantly, Japanese expansionism in the region bordering on Mongolia created the potential for what Stalin mostly feared—the connection between anti-state insurgencies and intervention from abroad. The violence of the insurgencies was no doubt a major factor leading to the policy turn. However, it is unlikely that without the perceived threat of a Japanese intervention would Moscow have allowed the abandonment of collectivization. Just six years later Soviet and Japanese troops clashed in large-scale battles on Mongolian territory (Kuromiya 2014).

#### THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD IN CHINA'S AGRO-PASTORAL REGIONS

Unlike in Mongolia and Xinjiang during the 1930s, Moscow, up to the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, was not an important factor in Maoist policies in the Chinese countryside in the 1950s. The USSR's role as grain importer from

China, underscored in the official Chinese historiography as one of the factors that led to the GLF famine, has been debunked by recent research, which points to the Chinese leadership's refusal of aid (Dikötter 104-15). Soviet assistance was also of secondary importance in the devising of Chinese policies in the countryside before the Great Famine. In the 1950s Soviet advisers were mostly concentrated in China's industrial sector (see Jershild; Lüthi), though the country enjoyed a certain amount of Soviet assistance in the agricultural sector as well. The USSR had helped to create twenty-four mechanized corn-growing state farms in the "virgin lands" of Heilongjiang (formerly Manchuria) during China's First Five-Year Plan (1953-57), and Soviet agronomists from the Russian Far East visited a state farm and newly created communes in the region in 1959.<sup>37</sup>

Echoing the contemporary Soviet plan for Northern Kazakhstan and Southern Siberia, in 1956 the Committee for Scientific Planning (CSP, attached to the State Council of the Chinese People's Republic), designed a study of the "virgin lands" of Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, and Inner Mongolia in order to expand agriculture through irrigation, avoid salinization of the soil, and protect the newly cultivated areas from sandstorms and soil erosion.<sup>38</sup> The same regions, defined in another CSP report as "the crucial pastoral districts of our country," were at the centre of Chinese plans to expand livestock breeding of all kinds of animals except pigs. The plan was to have between thirty and forty-two percent of China's horses, cattle, sheep, and goats concentrated in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, and Inner Mongolia in the following ten years. The Kazakh SSR and Kyrgyz SSR were explicitly mentioned as the main sources of knowledge in relation to the Chinese "virgin lands" and livestock breeding. The CSP asked the USSR to send livestock-breeding and pasture specialists, but it does not seem that Chinese-Soviet collaboration in the pastoral sector went much beyond the importation of livestock from the USSR. Soviet animals were imported into China from 1950 onwards and successfully hybridized with local animal varieties.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> GARF, A310/1/13042, "V. I. Platonov, T. I. Semenenko, 'Otchet o poezdke v severo-vostochnye provintsii KNR dlia izucheniia opyta vozdeleyvaniia kukuruzy i soi,' 6 Aug. 1959.

<sup>38</sup> Russian State Archive of the Economy (hereafter RGAE), 9480/3/1660/160-76, "Zapiska po zadache no. 4, 'Kompleksnoe issledovanie raionov Sintsiania, Tsinkhaia, Gan'sun, Vnutrennei Mongolii: Razrabotka skhemy ikh osvoeniia," 1956 (the translations of the Chinese materials transmitted to the Soviet ally).

<sup>39</sup> RGAE, 9480/3/1660/186-87, 189, 193-94, "Komitet po planirovaniu nauki pri

Like China's agricultural core, the agro-pastoral regions were also stricken by the GLF. In comparison to China's breadbaskets, they have been much less studied by historians of the famine. Future regional studies of Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Qinghai will be particularly interesting for a comparison with the Soviet famines also because they and Yunnan are the regions where most of China's "ethnic minorities" are concentrated. Garnaut has noted that "the experience of the Chinese steppe stands in contrast to that of the Soviet steppe in the early 1930s" because "the multiethnic borderlands of China, including Tibet, much of Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, appear to have been spared the worst of the famine" (Garnaut 337). The absence of railways, modern roads, and navigable rivers connecting these regions with China's main importation areas may help explain this pattern, but a systematic study is needed. The comparative framework is much more promising for Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang than for the Tibetan Plateau, because Tibet's year-round high altitude pastoralism has no parallels in the USSR.

### *Inner Mongolia*

Looking at these three peripheral regions of China, while bearing in mind the Kazakhstan case, raises a number of questions. Inner Mongolia seems to be the Chinese province with conditions closest to those in Kazakhstan during the early Soviet period. In Kazakhstan the tsarist-built railroads and the newly completed Turkestan-Siberian Railway (Turksib) made the huge scale of resource extraction from the region possible. Significant rail connections to the main urban and industrial centres of the country were lacking in Xinjiang and Tibet, but Inner Mongolia had at least one major connection—the Beijing-Hohhot-Baotou railway completed in 1924 (Williams 28). However, from the sparse published documents one can conclude that the railway connection between Inner Mongolia and the major industrial centres relatively close to the region, Beijing and Tianjin, seems to have collapsed under the pressure of food transportation demands; and that, in any case, grain was the main foodstuff transferred.<sup>40</sup>

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Gosudarstvennom Sovete KNR, "Zapiska po probleme: Ratsional'noe ispol'zovanie stepnykh raionov Sin'tsiana, Tsinkhaia, Gansu, i Vnutrennei Mongolii, sozdanie kormovykh baz, uluchenie porod skota, razrabotka meropriiatii po bor'be ego zabolevaniia" (Beijing, June 1956). On the use of the concept of "hybridization" in Lysenkoist livestock breeding, see Smith 132-35.

<sup>40</sup> GLF database, "Allocation and transportation of food from Inner Mongolia to help Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and other areas of the country," 内蒙古积极调运粮食支援

In general the role that livestock procurements and their inter-regional transportation played during the Chinese famine is understudied. General accounts of the famine mention the huge livestock losses linked to “communalization” and GLF policies (see Yang 120-21, 209-10, 241, 252, 392), but analyses of inter-regional transfers of livestock immediately before and during the famine are lacking, at least in the English-language literature.

As I argued above, the fact that the Kazakh steppe was a marginal pastoral-agricultural society inhabited by both Slavic peasants and Kazakhs, who mostly practiced pastoralism, was an important precondition for the famine because it led to food interdependence between peasants and pastoralists based on trade and barter. The extraction of food resources (state procurements) and suppression of trade brought disruption to this economic system. Inner Mongolia had been in a comparable situation, with its hundreds of thousands of Han settlers who had immigrated into the region during the nineteenth century and especially since 1901, when the Qing government started backing agricultural colonization consistently (see Atwood). Moreover, according to official data, the net in-migration into Inner Mongolia amounted to 1.93 million between 1958 and 1960, while in 1961 and 1962 the region experienced a post-famine out-migration of 690,000 people, most probably refugees who decided to go back to their regions of origin when the situation at home improved (Banister 277; Bulag 89; Gao 174). The question of the degree of interdependence between peasants and pastoralists in Inner Mongolia merits further investigation. In general, the closeness of the region to Beijing and the industrial northeast, the huge out-migration of famine refugees during the GLF, and the existence of at least one major railway connecting the region with the capital beg the question about whether the severity of the famine in the region has not been understated. In April 1958 an official Party report predicted “an outbreak of famine” after the spring planting in Inner Mongolia, where “at least 800,000 people” were “facing food shortages.”<sup>41</sup> The first “people’s commune” was created in Inner Mongolia on 23 August 1958.<sup>42</sup>

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京津沪等地, 毛纯礼, 26 Apr. 1960.

<sup>41</sup> See “A summary report from the General Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party regarding food shortages and riots in sixteen provinces and autonomous regions, as well as measures proposed by local Party Committees to resolve the problem, [Beijing], April 25, 1958,” in Zhou 12.

<sup>42</sup> GLF database, “The first people’s commune formed in Inner Mongolia,” 内蒙古建立第一个人民公社, 27 Aug. 1958.

The fertility data sets Garnaut used tend to be less useful for regions that experienced a significant in-migration during the famine period, where the “pattern of famine [...] partially obscured” (Garnaut 339).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, grain transfers between Economic Co-ordination Regions (ECRs), the other main source for Garnaut’s study, are not useful for assessing the situation in Inner Mongolia, because the province was part of the “North ECR” along with some of the most urbanized and industrialized areas of the country (Beijing, Tianjin) (Garnaut 328, 330-31). As a matter of fact, the data anthropologist David Sneath collected using local archives and oral testimonies in two of the most purely pastoral areas of Inner Mongolia, Shilingol and Hulun Buir Districts, show a marked fall (almost ten percent) of the Mongolian population during the famine. The worst year of hunger in Hulun Buir District was 1962, later than in the rest of China. The purely pastoral areas of Inner Mongolia followed the general pattern of Han in-migration during the famine and out-migration from the region just after the crisis. In Hulun Buir District, the Han population increased from 670,032 in 1958 to 1,087,549 in 1960 (Sneath 88, 97). As in the Soviet pastoral regions, the Maoist government pushed for a breakneck increase of land under cultivation. In Hulun Buir District the amount of farmland more than doubled between 1959 and 1960 (at least according to official data). It remained stable before falling sharply between 1961 and 1963 (but to a level that was thirty percent higher than before the GLF), when the local administration returned marginal lands to pasture. In subsequent years cultivated land grew steadily but slowly (Sneath 100-101).<sup>44</sup> The number of livestock in Inner Mongolia, as in the USSR during collectivization, did decrease, but *before* the GLF, from more than 19 million head in 1956 to 16 million in 1957 (Sneath 74-76, 83). It is uncertain whether the political disruptions that began at this time or the harsh winter conditions of 1956-57 were the main cause of the decrease.

The demographic balance between the Han Chinese and the Mongols and the situation in the Kazakh Steppe were comparable only at the turn of the twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century the situation was already significantly different. In 1912 the population ratio in Inner Mongolia was already 1.3 Han for to every Mongol (Williams 28). According

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<sup>43</sup> Garnaut mentions Southern China and the in-migration into the Pearl River Delta, but he does not mention Inner Mongolia in this respect.

<sup>44</sup> According to Sneath the decision by Inner Mongolia’s Communist leadership in January 1963 to stop the widening of agricultural land in the region directly contradicted explicit instructions from Beijing.

to various estimates, the ratio there in 1947 was already four to 5.6 Han for every Mongol, while in 1960 it reached nine Han for every Mongol (Banister 276; Sneath 88). Conversely, in Kazakhstan immediately before the famine the population ratio was approximately two Kazakhs for every non-Kazakh.

Yang Jisheng has cited official statistics published in the 1980s regarding grain availability per capita in most of China's provinces, according to which Inner Mongolia was the most well-to-do province in 1958, 1959 and 1960.<sup>45</sup> The province also had the lowest death rate in China in 1958 and 1960, and the third-lowest (after Fujian and Zhejiang) in 1959 (Kung and Lin 67-68).<sup>46</sup> We can therefore tentatively conclude, insofar as these official figures are meaningful, that during the GLF in Inner Mongolia the impact on local famine conditions of the legacy of past agricultural colonization and the new policies of peasant in-migration was not as significant as it was in Soviet Kazakhstan.

### *Qinghai and Tibet*

Felix Wemheuer recently examined the events in Qinghai and Tibet during the GLF, characterized by widespread revolts in Qinghai in 1958 and in Tibet in 1959 (Wemheuer 157-220). The impact of the GLF in Tibet still awaits a proper study—a difficult task given the lack of access to relevant archival materials in China and the issue's political sensitivity. On the basis of the scant data available (which are even scarcer than for other regions), Wemheuer contests the official narrative of the absence of famine in Tibet during the GLF. Even official statistical data show that between 1953 and 1964 the ethnic Tibetan population in China declined by 252,000, or 9.1 percent, and a fourth of this loss happened in Tibet itself, where 36 percent of the Tibetan population in China lived in 1953 (Ma 21, 30). These figures do not take into account the natural increase of the population between 1953 and the end of the decade. It is therefore safe to suppose that more than ten percent of the Tibetan population either died or fled from the country between the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s. Wemheuer relates this decrease to China's sedentarization policies and the imposition of the people's communes in order to expand agriculture among the Tibetan

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<sup>45</sup> 楊繼繩, “墓碑：中國六十年代大饑荒紀實” (香港：天地圖書, 2008), 542. I am indebted to Liu Guangfeng for the translation from the original Chinese edition of Yang Jisheng's work.

<sup>46</sup> Their source is: State Statistical Bureau, *A Compendium of Materials on Population and Census Statistics, 1949-1985 / Renkou Tongji Ziliao Huibian, 1949-1985* (Beijing: Zhongguo Caizheng Jingji Chubanshe, 1988).

population, which lived not only in Tibet but also in Amdo, Kham, Gansu, and Qinghai (Wemheuer 184-86).

However, at the present stage of research, it is impossible to weigh the different factors properly and disentangle the possible impact of the famine in the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding areas from other factors that could have caused the population decrease, such as the military suppression of the 1959 revolt and the mass exodus across the border into India that followed. The flight of Tibetans in March 1959 involved approximately 100,000 people, many of them monks who followed the Dalai Lama into exile (Gatrell 48; Ma 158; Van Schaik 224-37). Moreover, people's communes were introduced in the Tibetan Autonomous Region later than in the other Chinese provinces, starting in 1965 (but, as noted above, the majority of China's Tibetans resided in other provinces) (Ma 27). Be that as it may, the Tibetan Plateau was not a region where there was a significant presence of Han settlers or where the agricultural-pastoral society was divided along ethnic lines. Han residents in the Tibet Autonomous Region numbered 36,700 in 1964 (2.93 percent of the total population); approximately half this number were there during the 1950s. Before 1949 the Han Chinese in Tibet were officials, soldiers, merchants, servants, artisans, and monks, but there were no peasants among them, and after the People's Liberation Army's conquest of the region, their number remained very limited (Ma 47, 51).<sup>47</sup>

Even after the introduction of the communes during the Cultural Revolution, no attempt was made to turn Tibetan pastoralists into peasants or to resettle Tibetan or Han peasants on land the nomads used as pastures. Tibet's high altitude (the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau has an average elevation of 4,500 metres) and the lack of roads made the remote region an exception in Maoist agricultural policies (Goldstein and Beall 144).<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the disruption of trade and the destruction of the monastic economy (in the 1950s monasteries and senior monks owned almost forty percent of the total cultivated land), in addition to the expropriation of livestock for the communes, had a negative impact on the nomads' livelihood (Ma 150). The

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<sup>47</sup> Only 3.4 percent of Han Chinese in Tibet were peasants in 1990 (Ma 62).

<sup>48</sup> Given the absence of roads and the scarcity of grain, feeding the 8,000-strong Chinese Communist garrison in Lhasa after the occupation of Tibet in 1951 and 1952 turned out to be an almost insurmountable problem for Beijing. See Golstein 244-64. On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet see Golstein, Jiao, and Lhundrup. The book includes interviews with former monks, containing details about the suppression of monasteries from 1959 onwards.

Tibetan pastoralists were no less dependent on trade than the pastoralists in the Kazakh Steppe. Even in a high-altitude pastoralist region like Tibet, the Tibetans' diet was mostly based on cereals. The nomads' staple food was a barley dish called *tsamba*, while proteins were provided by milk and milk products during the summer and meat during the winter. Barley was obtained by trade with peasant communities in exchange for pastoral products (hides, wool, cheese, butter) (Jones, 66-69, 77-78; Goldstein and Beall, 28, 80-105, 114-15).

Unlike Tibet, Qinghai was a region inhabited by both Tibetans and Han peasants, as well as other groups, such as Salar. Wemheuer cites Chinese historiography showing that the official number of livestock in Qinghai sharply decreased. Most of that decrease, as in Inner Mongolia, happened *before* the GLF, from 15 million in 1957 to 10.8 million in 1958. In 1960 there was a further but lesser decrease to 9.3 million. This was apparently a consequence of the "dizziness with success" retreat in the region's agricultural policies that the provincial government (no doubt backed by Beijing) decreed in the late spring and the summer of 1959. Wemheuer writes that cases of "excesses" were investigated, while "compensation for the loss of cattle" was "paid" (Wemheuer 170, 172). Citing official statistics on grain production and transfers published in the 1980s, he points out that during the whole period of collectivization and the GLF (1953-64) Qinghai was a net consumer and importer of grains from China's other regions. As much as forty percent of the population of the province, slightly more than one million people, depended on rations in 1960. This was a higher number than that year's urban population of 824,600 in Qinghai (Wemheuer 172).

At the current state of research, it seems that the environmental specificity of Tibet, the absence of modern communication lines with China proper, and the peculiarities of its annexation to the Communist state made it a unique case in the twentieth-century history of Inner Asian pastoral regions. Qinghai also seems to have been spared the worst of the famine.

### *Xinjiang*

Xinjiang was in a particularly critical geographical position because of its proximity to the USSR, which exercised military and political influence until the People's Liberation Army conquered the region. In 1951 and 1952 a "land reform" was implemented there at the same time as it was in China proper. Oral testimonies I collected in Kazakhstan among people who emigrated from Xinjiang to the USSR confirm the harshness of the measures, which were not limited to the sedentary population. Among Uyghurs and Dungans the "land reform" meant the physical elimination of "landlords." A small quantity of land (one hectare per family) was distributed among the poor (Patarov; see also Millward 241-42; and

McMillen 151-52). According to one source, initial attempts at sedentarizing the Kazakhs in the region were made already in 1952, when the nomads were gathered into newly created large villages with a minimum of approximately one hundred yurts (that is, of five hundred or so Kazakhs) each. That year herders were forbidden from moving to the summer pastures. The resistance and an upsurge in animal slaughtering led to a truce in the late summer of 1952, when the “land reform” was stopped. Arrested pastoralists were released from prisons, and annual pastoral transhumance was allowed again (Dauletkhan). In 1954 military colonization and the creation of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (*Bingtuan*) led to the influx of hundreds of thousands of Han, of whom 175,000 became registered *Bingtuan* members that year (Banister 270). The first wave of collectivization started in 1955, including in pastoral areas. In the Ili Autonomous District poor Kazakh herders were included in “co-operatives” on a voluntary basis.

The GLF was launched in the pastoral areas of Xinjiang in the summer of 1958 with the creation of the first communes. In August most men in the Ili district were sent to build roads and furnaces. The neglect of harvesting work in 1958 led to famine conditions the following year. According to witnesses, the weakest—the old and the sick—began dying. A norm of five hundred grams of corn per person per day was distributed in the schools, thus saving children and teenagers from starvation (Dauletkhan). Tens of thousands of Han in-migrants had moved into Xinjiang each year since the beginning of the 1950s (with a peak of more than 100,000 in 1954). In 1959 and 1960 they increased to more than 300,000 per year, possibly half a million, when famine refugees from other parts of China flooded into the region. By 1962, when a return migration of famine refugees started, the Han already numbered two million, or thirty percent of the province’s population (Banister 266-67). Some of the best agricultural land was given to Han refugees in the attempt, common to all China’s pastoral areas, to expand cultivated land. According to official data, cultivated land in the region tripled between 1949 and 1961, reaching 3.2 million hectares (Millward 254). Even if deaths caused by starvation were already common in 1959, mass deaths of thousands of people in a single district were the exception. The worst case was the Bai District in Kashgaria, Southern Xinjiang, where the district head refused to distribute part of the grain reserve, thereby causing the death of thousands of peasants (Dauletkhan).

In the spring of 1959 Beijing launched a more systematic attempt at sedentarizing nomads, in the process again forbidding pastoralists to move to summer pastures with their herds. As in the USSR almost thirty years earlier, “sedentarization points” were chosen. In the Altai area, eighty thousand Kazakhs had to settle in 150 locations (McMillen 158). It is not

clear, however, how and to what extent these decisions were implemented. Widespread starvation and in-migration from China proper continued in 1960 and 1961. In 1961 the streets of Urumqi were full of long-bearded famine refugees dressed in rags (Dauletkhan). That same year Uyghur and Dungan peasants were dying in the village streets of Ili valley villages close to the Soviet border. This led to the intensification of flights across the border into Soviet territory (Yuldasheva). Those who could flee were those who possessed a Soviet identity document, either because they had fled to the USSR starting in the late 1920s (the father of my informant Ibadat Yuldasheva had fled in 1928 from Dzharkent in Kazakhstan) or because they received identity documents from Soviet consulates in Xinjiang. In the late 1940s 100,000 passports had been granted to Xinjiang Central Asians and 20,000 Russians living in the region as a way of preserving Soviet influence in Western China (Lüthi 214).

Emigration from Xinjiang to the USSR started in the 1950s, intensified during the GLF, and became a mass exodus in 1962, when people with Soviet passports living in Xinjiang who refused to switch to Chinese citizenship were subjected to varying degrees of discrimination, including denial of food rations and expulsion from work and state housing (Lüthi 215). About 72,000 people fled from Xinjiang during the April-May 1962 crisis, and Chinese let an additional 47,000 people flee from September 1962 to November 1963.<sup>49</sup>

Until China's local and central archival materials relevant for the study of the GLF in the region become accessible, the evidence about the regional famine in Xinjiang will remain anecdotal. At this point, it seems that the region escaped the worst of the famine and accommodated hundreds of thousands of famine refugees from other regions. It is also apparent, as Garnaut suggested and witnesses confirm, that widespread starvation was present in the Ili Valley from 1959 to 1961. According to official data, the quantity of livestock in Xinjiang recovered to pre-GLF levels by the mid-1960s (McMillen 162). As in Inner Mongolia, it does not seem that a major collapse in the animal population occurred there.

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<sup>49</sup> Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (APRK), 708/36/1508/23-31, "TsK KPK, Dokladnaia zapiska o razmeshchenii i khoziaistvennogo-bytovom ustroistve grazhdan, pribyvshikh iz KNR (Zam. predsedatelia Gosudarstvennogo komiteta SM KazSSR po professional'no-tekhnicheskomu obrazovaniuu, organizovannomu naboru rabochikh i pereseleniiu, N. Kombarov," 16 Nov. 1963.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested possible future comparative research topics pertaining to the pastoral regions of China, Mongolia, and the USSR of the 1930s through 1960s, especially in relation to the great Soviet and GLF famines. Eventually such studies should lead to a transnational history of the traumatic transformation of pastoral societies in Central Eurasia in the twentieth century, connecting the different episodes of collectivization, sedentarization, and famine.

In the general context of the extortionary policies of the Chinese Communist and Soviet states, the various regional famines that made up the two countrywide great famines were events influenced by factors specific to a region (such as agricultural colonization in Kazakhstan) or having crucial importance only in one region (such as the national factor in Ukraine). Recent English-language historical literature about the GLF famine demonstrates that colonial and national factors were not important in determining the severity of the famine in any region of China. The imperial character of the Soviet state was interlinked with the Communist famines there much more than was the case in China.

Moreover, even if systematic research still does not exist for China's pastoral regions during the GLF, we can conclude that no pastoral region in China was subjected to the same degree of extreme meat- and livestock-requisitioning as Soviet Kazakhstan was from 1930 to 1932, and that no province in China was a divided agro-pastoral region that the government aimed at turning into a net exporter of grain to the detriment of local herders, as was the case in Soviet Kazakhstan in the early 1930s. Also the lack of a reliable transportation network from the peripheries (with the partial exception of Inner Mongolia) and the preoccupation with possible foreign interventions (USSR, perhaps India) could explain the relative restraint of China's policies towards its pastoral populations during the GLF.

The analysis of these factors explains the singularity of the great famine in Soviet Kazakhstan in the early 1930s and why the Kazakhs, the most numerous pastoral population in modern Inner Asia, suffered considerably more than any other Inner Asian pastoral population from the consequences of Communist "revolutions from above" in twentieth-century Eurasia.

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