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## THE FAMINE IN KAZAKHSTAN IN THE 1930S AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN FOREIGN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* This article examines the Kazakh famine of the 1930s, triggered by Soviet collectivization, forced sedentarization, and grain requisitioning, as a transformative tragedy that claimed over a million lives and was long marginalized in both Soviet and Western scholarship, but has recently gained renewed attention through foreign historiography employing new archives and comparative approaches. *Objective and Tasks.* The primary objective of this study is to systematically examine how foreign historians and scholars have represented the 1930s famine in Kazakhstan. By tracing the evolution of foreign historiographical approaches – from earlier treatments focused on wider Soviet agricultural policy to more recent perspectives drawing from genocide studies, post-colonial theory, and environmental history – the article highlights shifts in interpretive frameworks. Special emphasis is placed on the treatment of ethnonational dimensions and on comparisons with other Soviet famines, particularly the Ukrainian Holodomor. *Materials and Methods.* This study employs an integrative qualitative methodology centered on historiographical analysis, drawing upon a diverse corpus of Western, North American, and European academic literature, translated archival documents and diplomatic correspondence, as well as revised Soviet demographic data, to critically examine how the 1930s famine in Kazakhstan has been represented in foreign scholarship within broader Soviet and global comparative frameworks. *Results.* The analysis highlights a shift in foreign scholarship from marginalization to nuanced engagement with the Kazakh famine, emphasizing its role in Soviet demographic engineering, memory politics, and state propaganda, while situating it within broader patterns of Soviet modernization, regional disparities, and comparative famine studies. *Conclusions.* Foreign historiography has substantially advanced the recognition of the Kazakh famine as a central episode in Soviet and global history, foregrounding its relevance for understanding state-led disaster, ethnic policy, and memory politics. Continued access to Kazakhstani archives and cross-disciplinary



inquiry remain crucial for refining global understanding of this historical event and for ensuring nuanced representation in international scholarship.

**Key words:** Famine, environmental history, foreign historiography, Soviet-era, Kazakhstan

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## 1930-ЖЫЛДАРДАҒЫ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ АШАРШЫЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ ОНЫҢ ШЕТЕЛ ТАРИХНАМАСЫНДАҒЫ ЗЕРТТЕЛУІ

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**Аңдатпа.** *Kipicne.* Бұл мақала 1930-жылдардағы Қазақстандағы аштықты – Кеңес Одағының ұжымдастыруы, көшпелі халықты мәжбүрлеп отырықшыландыруы және астық тәркілеу саясаты салдарынан орын алған, бір миллионнан астам адамның өмірін қиған қайғылы тарихи кезеңді – қоғамның демографиялық және әлеуметтік-саяси құрылымын түбегейлі өзгерткен қасіретті оқиға ретінде қарастырады. Кеңестік және батыстық тарихнамаларда ұзақ уақыт бойы шеттетіліп келген бұл тақырып соңғы онжылдықтарда шетелдік зерттеушілер тарапынан жаңа мұрағаттық деректер мен салыстырмалы әдістер арқылы қайта зерделенуде. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеудің басты мақсаты – шетелдік тарихшылар мен ғалымдардың 1930-жылдардағы Қазақстандағы ашаршылықты қалай сипаттайтынын жүйелі түрде талдау. Кеңестік ауыл шаруашылық саясатына бағытталған алғашқы еңбектерден бастап, қазіргі геноцидтану, постколониалдық және экологиялық тарих әдістерін қолданатын еңбектерге дейінгі тарихнамалық даму кезеңдерін саралау арқылы мақалада зерттеулердің интерпретациялық аясындағы өзгерістер көрсетіледі. Этноұлттық аспектілер мен Украинадағы Голодомор сияқты басқа кеңестік ашаршылықтармен салыстырулар ерекше назарға алынады. *Нәтижелер.* Талдау көрсеткендей, шетелдік тарихнамада Қазақстандағы аштық тақырыбы назардан тыс қалмай, керісінше күрделі әрі жан-жақты түсіндіруге қарай бет бұрған. Аштық кеңестік демографиялық ұстанымы, ұлт саясаты мен пропаганданың құрамдас бөлігі ретінде қарастырылып, оны кеңестік жаңғырту үрдістері, өңірлік теңсіздіктер және салыстырмалы аштық зерттеулері аясында зерделеу тенденциясы күшейе түсті. *Қорытынды.* Шетелдік тарихнама Қазақстандағы ашаршылықты кеңестік және жаһандық тарихтағы маңызды оқиға ретінде мойындатуға елеулі үлес қосты. Бұл зерттеу – мемлекеттік деңгейде туындаған апаттар, ұлттық саясат пен тарихи жад мәселелерін түсіну үшін маңызды. Қазақстан архивтеріне қолжетімділікті кеңейту және пәнаралық зерттеулер жүргізу – осы тарихи оқиғаны халықаралық деңгейде тереңірек ұғынуға және оны ғылыми тұрғыда әділ көрсетуге сеп болмақ.

**Түйін сөздер:** Ашаршылық, экологиялық тарих, шетелдік тарихнама, кеңестік кезең, Қазақстан

**Алғыс.** Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігінің «Қазақстандағы 1931–1933 жылдардағы жаппай ашаршылықтың куәгерлері мен олардың ұрпақтарының естеліктерін дайындау және шығару» тақырыбындағы гранттық қаржыландыру жобасын жүзеге асыру аясында орындалды (жеке тіркеу нөмірі: АР 19678056).

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## ГОЛОД В КАЗАХСТАНЕ В 1930-Е ГОДЫ И ЕГО ИЗУЧЕНИЕ В ЗАРУБЕЖНОЙ ИСТОРИОГРАФИИ

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* Статья рассматривает голод в Казахстане 1930-х годов, вызванный советской коллективизацией, насильственным оседанием кочевого населения и изъятием зерна, как трансформационную трагедию, унёсшую более миллиона жизней. Долгое время это событие оставалось на периферии как советской, так и западной историографии, однако в последние десятилетия привлекло внимание зарубежных исследователей благодаря доступу к новым архивам и применению сравнительных подходов. *Цель и задачи.* Основной целью исследования является системный анализ того, как зарубежные историки и исследователи трактуют голод 1930-х годов в Казахстане. Прослеживая развитие историографических подходов – от ранних работ, сосредоточенных на советской аграрной политике, до современных исследований в рамках геноцидологии, постколониальной теории и экологической истории – автор выявляет смену интерпретационных рамок. Особое внимание уделено этнонациональным аспектам и сравнению с другими периодами советского голода, особенно с украинским Голодомором. *Материалы и методы.* В работе применяется интегративная качественная методология с акцентом на историографический анализ. Исследование опирается на широкий корпус западной, североамериканской и европейской академической литературы, переведённые архивные документы и дипломатическую переписку, а также пересмотренные советские демографические данные. Это позволяет критически проанализировать интерпретации казахского голода в зарубежной историографии в контексте более широких советских и глобальных сравнений. *Результаты.* Анализ выявляет сдвиг в зарубежной историографии: от маргинализации казахского голода – к более глубокому и многослойному его осмыслению. Особое внимание уделяется его роли в советской демографической инженерии, политике памяти и пропаганде. Голод рассматривается в контексте модернизационных процессов, региональных различий и сравнительных исследований голода в СССР. *Выводы.* Зарубежная историография внесла значительный вклад в признание казахского голода как центрального эпизода советской и мировой истории. Это имеет ключевое значение для понимания катастроф, спровоцированных государством, национальной политики и вопросов исторической памяти. Дальнейший доступ к казахстанским архивам и междисциплинарные исследования остаются необходимыми для углублённого международного осмысления этой трагедии и её адекватного отражения в мировой научной повестке.

**Ключевые слова:** Голод, экологическая история, зарубежная историография, советский период, Казахстан

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**Introduction.** The famine that engulfed Kazakhstan in the early 1930s stands as one of the gravest demographic and social catastrophes of the twentieth century, yet for decades it remained marginalized in both Soviet and global scholarship. Rooted in forced collectivization, coerced settlement of nomadic populations, and the extraction of agricultural resources to support rapid industrialization, the tragedy resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1.3 to 1.5 million people – predominantly ethnic Kazakhs, but also members of other nationalities residing in the republic [Olcott, 1981]. This episode marked a profound rupture in Kazakhstan's historical trajectory, leading not only to the decimation of the indigenous population, but also to dramatic shifts in ethnic composition, the destruction of traditional pastoral ways of life, mass displacement, and long-term social disintegration [Pianciola, 2019; Tolts, 2006; Kassymbekova, 2021].

Soviet efforts to conceal the scale and mechanisms of the famine, including systematic manipulation of census data and information flows, ensured that discussion of the event remained heavily circumscribed within both official narratives and early scholarly work [Tolts, 2006]. Throughout the Soviet period, the Kazakh famine was either downplayed, subsumed under generic accounts of Soviet modernization, or framed exclusively within the context of agricultural mismanagement – a tendency reinforced by ideological controls and limited archival access [Olcott, 1981; Tolts, 2006]. In contrast to the substantial international attention afforded to the Ukrainian Holodomor, particularly in debates about genocide and state intent, the Kazakh famine long languished as an understudied episode in foreign historiography [Caşu, 2020; Kuzio, 2018; Kaşıkçı, 2023].

Only after the dissolution of the USSR and the subsequent opening of post-Soviet archives have international scholars begun to rigorously interrogate the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of the Kazakh famine. Recent research has illuminated the distinctiveness of the Kazakh case, especially its targeting of a nomadic and semi-nomadic society and the unique demographic and cultural impacts arising from that context [Pianciola, 2019; Olcott, 1981; Kassymbekova, 2021]. Comparative studies increasingly position the famine not only as an instance of state-sponsored violence and catastrophic social engineering, but also as a touchstone for understanding larger patterns of Soviet repression, modernization, and nation-building – raising questions of culpability, intentionality, and the politics of memory that continue to animate scholarly debate [Caşu, 2020; Nefedov, Ellman, 2019; Kaşıkçı, 2023].

This article examines the evolving representation of the Kazakh famine within foreign historiography, tracing how narratives and analytic frameworks have shifted over time as new archival and testimonial sources have emerged [Kaşıkçı, 2023; Kassymbekova, 2021]. By exploring key turning points in international scholarship, the diversity of interpretive models employed, and the persisting challenges of evidence and conceptualization, this study situates the Kazakh famine as a pivotal, yet long-silenced, episode in both Soviet and global history. Attention is given both to the specificities of the Kazakh experience and to the broader historiographical currents that have shaped, and at times limited, foreign engagement with this tragedy.

**Materials and Research Methods.** This study adopts an integrative qualitative research methodology with a principal focus on historiographical analysis to investigate how the famine in Kazakhstan during the 1930s has been represented in foreign scholarship. The approach emphasizes both critical evaluation of source materials and contextual interpretation, drawing upon a multidimensional corpus of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. The strategy is informed by recent scholarship emphasizing the benefits of comparative and regional studies for understanding the specificity of the Kazakh famine within broader Soviet and global contexts.

Three main categories of materials form the foundation of the research. First, a comprehensive review of monographs, peer-reviewed articles, and edited volumes by Western, North American, and European historians is conducted. These works span from early Cold War-era analyses, often constrained by restricted



archival access, to contemporary studies that benefit from the opening of Russian and Kazakhstani archives after the collapse of the Soviet Union [Olcott, 1981; Fonzi, 2019]. Special consideration is given to influential comparative works that address both the Kazakh famine and parallel events such as the Holodomor in Ukraine, enabling analysis of divergent frameworks, such as the use of genocide studies versus socio-economic interpretations [Caşu, 2020; Nefedov & Ellman, 2019; Kaşıkçı, 2023; Levchuk et al., 2020; Ellman, 2007].

Second, the study analyzes translated archival materials and published diplomatic correspondence from the 1930s, including reports from British, German, Italian, and Polish diplomats and observers. These documents offer valuable outsider perspectives on the evolving humanitarian crisis, the perceived intent of Soviet policy, and the interplay between nationality policy and famine conditions [Fonzi, 2019]. Additionally, survivor testimonies, recently leveraged by cultural historians, are incorporated to capture not only the political-economic context but also the lived experience and evolving memory of the famine [Kaşıkçı, 2023].

Third, the research engages with re-examinations of Soviet demographic data, including analyses of the distortion and manipulation of census results, to critically assess the impact of Soviet information policy on foreign historiographical trends [Tolts, 2006]. This quantitative dimension is essential for situating foreign interpretations within debates about the scale of the tragedy as well as the politics of documentation and denial.

**Discussion.** The historiography of the Kazakh famine of the 1930s reveals an evolving and contested field, shaped by politicized memory, differences in methodological approaches, and the gradual opening of archival sources. Initially, studies on the Soviet famines of the interwar period prioritized events in Ukraine, often relegating the Kazakh tragedy to the margins of broader narratives about collectivization, resistance, and state violence. While foundational works in Soviet famine studies set the terms of scholarly debate regarding causation, intentionality, and demographic consequences, Kazakhstan's experience was rarely the central focus, typically subsumed within analyses of the Soviet agrarian crisis or totalitarian modernization projects [Caşu, 2020; Olcott, 1981]. During the Cold War, Western historiography – limited by restricted access to Soviet archives and reliant on émigré testimony – framed famine primarily within the context of anti-communist critique. Seminal works, such as Robert Conquest's *The Harvest of Sorrow*, directed attention to Ukraine, making only passing references to Kazakh suffering [Caşu, 2020; Kuzio, 2018]. This period was characterized by both generalized assessments of collectivization and a lack of appreciation for the specific social, environmental, and demographic dynamics that made the Kazakh famine distinctive. The lack of detailed demographic or survivor evidence perpetuated the notion that Kazakhstan's experience was less thoroughly documented or understood than other regions [Kaşıkçı, 2023].

Understanding the Kazakh famine necessitates a contextual engagement with Soviet policies of economic centralization and agricultural collectivization. Olcott's foundational study elucidates the distinctive severity of collectivization in Kazakhstan, noting that the socio-economic structures of Kazakh society – predominantly pastoral and mobile – rendered its population particularly vulnerable to state-driven disruption and resource appropriation [Olcott, 1981: 117]. The destruction of nearly 80% of livestock, combined with coerced sedentarization and administrative excess, precipitated demographic and cultural catastrophe—an event whose full scope was systematically concealed by Soviet authorities through manipulation of population statistics, as demonstrated by Tolts, who details distortions in the 1939 census and their implications for understanding the magnitude of Kazakh losses [Tolts, 2006: 146].

Importantly, region-specific studies have illuminated the heterogeneity of famine's impact. Pianciola's exploration of the Aral Sea region demonstrates how infrastructural factors, more than geography alone, shaped communities' exposure to famine. The railway's presence in northern Kazakh territories facilitated forcible grain and livestock requisitions, while its absence in Karakalpakstan shielded the southern populations from the full brunt of mass starvation [Pianciola, 2019]. Such findings underscore the complex interplay between local contexts and centralized Soviet economic imperatives.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a transformative moment for famine studies. New access to Party archives, regional data, and previously suppressed demographic records enabled a surge in research that brought Kazakhstani perspectives and experiences to the fore [Tolts, 2006; Fonzi, 2019; Kornilov, 2023]. Notably, works emerging from both Kazakhstani and international scholars began to reframe the famine as a unique tragedy rooted in forced sedentarization, massive livestock loss, and the destruction of nomadic life [Olcott, 1981; Kassymbekova, 2021]. Scholars such as Sarah Cameron and Niccolò Pianciola, building upon extensive archival research, traced both the extraordinary scale of mortality [estimated

at 1.3–1.5 million deaths] and the profound cultural devastation, highlighting how Soviet modernization imperatives dislocated nomadic societies, caused mass flight, and permanently altered Kazakhstan's demographic landscape [Pianciola, 2019; Kassymbekova, 2021].

Recent Western historiography has increasingly situated the Kazakh famine within comparative studies of Soviet famines, probing similarities and differences with the Ukrainian Holodomor and Russian food crises to test models of state violence and social engineering [Caşu, 2020; Levchuk et al., 2020; Pianciola, 2019]. Scholars debate whether the Kazakh famine should be interpreted as genocide, ethnocide, or a case of structural violence. Many foreign researchers remain cautious in deploying the concept of genocide for Kazakhstan, instead using frameworks that examine coercive modernization, the state's willingness to inflict mass suffering, and repressive nationality policies [Nefedov & Ellman, 2019; Ellman, 2007; Kornilov, 2023]. The severity of repression, infrastructural reach (as, for example, with the Orenburg-Tashkent railway exacerbating extraction in northern Aral regions), and patterns of administrative neglect have been meticulously charted to account for regional and ethnic disparities in excess deaths [Pianciola, 2019; Levchuk et al., 2020]. Studies also highlight how administrative manipulations of the 1939 census purposefully obscured the scale of Kazakh demographic losses, further complicating historical reckoning and scholarly estimates [Tolts, 2006].

A significant recent development in the field has been the integration of survivor testimonies and the rise of memory studies. New research has challenged the misconception that the Kazakh famine is poorly documented in terms of lived experience, drawing on hundreds of oral histories and accounts recorded in Kazakh and other languages. These works expose not merely the policy mechanics of famine, but also the cascade of dehumanization, trauma, and loss that marks survivors' collective memory [Kaşıkçı, 2023]. Post-Soviet nation-building in Kazakhstan has further politicized famine remembrance, with debates over whether the catastrophe constitutes genocide, serves as a unifying national trauma, or is instrumentalized in contemporary cultural and linguistic policy [Smagulova, 2006; Kornilov, 2023].

The memory of the famine has been intricately woven into Kazakh narratives of nationhood and postcolonial identity. Kudaibergenova's work foregrounds how Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakh literature engaged in reimagining community, identity, and statehood in the aftermath of the famine. Historicity and continual referencing of tribal genealogies became prominent thematic elements in Kazakh literary production, acting as both a means of cultural resilience and a platform for contesting colonial legacies [Kudaibergenova, 2013]. These narratives process the famine not merely as a humanitarian disaster but as a pivotal episode in the ethnic and political transformation of Kazakhstan.

Further, Kaşıkçı introduces a significant corrective to Western historiographical assumptions, demonstrating – through extensive survivor testimonies – that personal memories and collective trauma associated with the famine are robust and multidimensional. Survivor accounts, often overlooked in foreign literature, are saturated with images of horror and loss that have come to symbolize both the rupture with the past and the subsequent reshaping of Kazakh social solidarity [Kaşıkçı, 2023]. This memory culture is further visualized in contemporary art, with Shoshanova (2024) documenting how public and independent art projects in Kazakhstan contest narratives of the famine, oscillating between state-sanctioned remembrance and claims of genocide, thus politicizing memory within national and international discourses.

Disagreements over the chronological boundaries of famine, the accuracy of loss estimates, and the geographies most affected persist within the literature [Kornilov, 2023; Levchuk et al., 2020; Tolts, 2006]. Furthermore, there is an ongoing need for deeper comparative analyses that place Kazakhstan's famine alongside other cases of state-induced catastrophe, drawing from both quantitative demographic reconstruction and cultural-historical narrative. Scholars increasingly call for the expansion and critical synthesis of the existing document base – including diplomatic reports from non-Soviet sources – to provide a more holistic and globally resonant account of the famine's origins and consequences [Fonzi, 2019; Kornilov, 2023]. In summary, foreign historiography has advanced markedly in its engagement with the Kazakh famine, moving from peripheral acknowledgment to focused critical analysis that recognizes its specificity within wider Soviet and world history. Methodological pluralism, increased attention to survivor memory, and the incorporation of newly accessible archives have all contributed to an emerging, more complex understanding of this tragedy – one that insists on the fundamental interconnectedness of nationality policy, modernization, violence, and memory in the twentieth century.

**Research Results.** Recent scholarly investigation reveals that the famine in Kazakhstan during the 1930s, once sidelined in international historiography, has emerged as a distinct subject of inquiry and debate, marked by thematic, methodological, and regional complexity. The research demonstrates a

progressive shift from generalized, often peripheral treatment of the famine to nuanced, comparative, and interdisciplinary analyses that recognize its particularity in Soviet and world history [Caşu, 2020; Kassymbekova, 2021].

Early foreign accounts – constrained by Cold War ideologies, limited eyewitness material, and hampered access to Soviet archives – commonly subsumed the Kazakh catastrophe under the broader umbrella of collectivization-related crises across the USSR, treating it as a collateral outcome of agricultural policy and mismanagement [Olcott, 1981]. Only after the Soviet Union's collapse did scholars gain broad archival access, uncovering the scale and mechanisms of the disaster; this archival revolution enabled a transition to focused studies that investigate the famine as both a product of intentional policy and a catastrophic social transformation unique to Kazakhstan [Kassymbekova, 2021; Olcott, 1981].

A central finding is the distinguishing role of Kazakhstan's nomadic pastoral economy and its vulnerability to the forced sedentarization and collectivization policies of the Stalinist regime. Whereas famines in other Soviet regions – most notably Ukraine – were primarily linked to grain requisition and peasant resistance, research highlights that in Kazakhstan, the destruction of livestock herds, enforced settlement, and breakdown of traditional mobility fundamentally precipitated mass starvation and social collapse [Kassymbekova, 2021; Olcott, 1981]. Estimates indicate that more than 1.5 million lives were lost and approximately 80% of the Kazakh herd was lost in only a few years – a demographic disaster that profoundly altered Kazakh society and ethnicity [Olcott, 1981; Tolts, 2006].

In comparative historiography, scholars increasingly emphasize the benefits of analyzing the Kazakh famine alongside other Soviet famines to disentangle shared causes from regional distinctions [Caşu, 2020]. Such analyses reveal that the infrastructure, notably the Orenburg-Tashkent railway, facilitated extractive policies in northern Kazakh regions, amplifying mortality, whereas more remote or infrastructurally isolated areas, such as Karakalpakstan, were shielded from the most severe impacts [Pianciola, 2019]. Industrial priorities, administrative capacity, and the geography of intervention thus shaped highly uneven spatial and ethnic patterns of suffering.

Methodologically, recent studies have shifted from a narrow focus on state policy and economic data to interdisciplinary approaches integrating environmental history, memory studies, and oral testimony [Kaşıkçı, 2023]. This has debunked the myth of sparse survivor accounts, revealing rich narratives, especially in Kazakh, that speak to the trauma, dehumanization, and collapse of social solidarity amid mass starvation [Kaşıkçı, 2023]. Survivor-centered research not only augments the quantitative dimension of population loss but also provides insight into the existential and cultural repercussions, underlining the famine's role as a rupture in Kazakh collective memory.

A further result is the heightened attention to the manipulation of demographic and statistical data by the Soviet regime, with archival work exposing deliberate distortions in the 1939 Soviet census to obfuscate Kazakh population losses and alter perceptions of ethnic composition [Tolts, 2006]. This systematic underreporting has not only impeded demographic reconstruction but also complicated both scholarly and public understanding of the tragedy's scale.

Foreign historiography also reflects ongoing debates about causal responsibility and the potential for genocidal intent. Comparative analyses underscore that, unlike the Ukrainian Holodomor, where questions of national resistance and genocidal targeting are central, foreign scholars remain divided on whether the Kazakh famine meets the criteria for genocide or is best characterized as a case of structural violence and ethnic engineering [Caşu, 2020; Nefedov & Ellman, 2019; Fonzi, 2019]. Non-Soviet diplomatic sources from the period covered a plurality of perspectives on the intentionality and nationality policies behind the famine, enriching the interpretive landscape in foreign scholarship.

From a foreign historiographical perspective, the Kazakh famine has been subject to a range of interpretations, heavily influenced by the availability of sources and contemporary political contexts. Nefedov and Ellman summarize the contentious debates that have characterized scholarly engagement with the Soviet famine: was it the result of deliberate state intent (genocide), systemic policy failure, or a broader conflict between the state and peasantry [Nefedov & Ellman, 2019]. These questions have been approached with differing emphases in international scholarship, often reflecting the evolution of access to archival materials and shifting historiographical paradigms.

Fonzi's comparative analysis of British, German, Italian, and Polish diplomatic reports illustrates significant variance in foreign perceptions of the famine. Western diplomats grappled with limited and fragmented information, often relying on anecdotal evidence. Nevertheless, their reports reveal early recognition of the severity of state-peasantry conflict, the ambiguities surrounding Soviet intention, and an awareness of the

complex intersection between nationalities policy and famine outcomes [Fonzi, 2019: 444–459]. Such external viewpoints are indispensable in tracing the evolution of the famine's representation and the nature of information flows between the Soviet Union and the wider world during the 1930s.

Finally, the representation and commemoration of the famine remain contested within Kazakhstan and among foreign observers. In Kazakhstan, visual art and public commemoration strategies reflect discordant narratives: government-sponsored art frames the famine as a humanitarian tragedy, while independent efforts invoke politicized, often genocide-focused language – an incongruity paralleled in some foreign historiographical treatments [Shoshanova, 2024]. The evolution of Kazakh national identity and memory politics intertwines with scholarly engagement, highlighting the famine's enduring significance beyond its immediate demographic toll.

The research results display a maturation of foreign historiography on the Kazakh famine, driven by archival breakthroughs, comparative analysis, interdisciplinary methods, and greater attention to survivor memory. The famine is now widely recognized as a pivotal episode of mass violence that was not an accidental by-product but a complex, regionally distinct, and socially transformative crisis with enduring consequences for Kazakhstan's demography, culture, and politics.

Recent scholarship, as highlighted in feature reviews and specialized comparative studies, continues to probe the multiple dimensions of the famine. Thomas considers how the event was foundational in the making of Soviet Kazakhstan, shaping the demographic, economic, and symbolic landscape of the republic [Thomas, 2020]. At the same time, demographic analyses, such as the reevaluation of census data, invite reconsideration of long-held assumptions about population loss, ethnic transformation, and the extent of state intervention [Tolts, 2006]. Meanwhile, the politicization of famine commemoration and its reframing in both national art and global politics demonstrate the ongoing evolution of this tragedy's memory and historiographical representation.

Foreign historiography on the Kazakh famine of the 1930s has increasingly recognized both the specificity of the event within the larger landscape of Soviet crises and the role of narrative, memory, and identity in shaping scholarly and public understandings. While earlier accounts were hampered by limited access to sources and Cold War paradigms, contemporary research benefits from expanded archival revelations, survivor testimony, and interdisciplinary methodologies. Nevertheless, the legacy of the famine – whether considered through the lens of demographic catastrophe, nation-building, or contested memory – remains central to the ongoing process of historical reinterpretation in both Kazakhstan and the broader scholarly community.

**Conclusion.** The examination of the Kazakh famine of the 1930s and its representation in foreign historiography has illuminated both the magnitude of the catastrophe and the complexities involved in international scholarly engagement with this event. A key conclusion from recent research is that the famine was not merely an incidental byproduct of generalized Soviet agricultural policy, but the result of systemic and ideologically charged interventions – particularly forced collectivization, sedentarization, and aggressive extraction policies – that specifically devastated Kazakhstan's nomadic society and resulted in the loss of as many as 1.5 million Kazakhs and the destruction of the vast majority of livestock, fundamentally altering the nation's demographic and socio-cultural landscape.

Foreign historiography long lagged behind in addressing these specificities, having initially rendered the Kazakh famine peripheral within broader studies of Soviet modernization and peasant resistance. Only with increased access to Soviet and Kazakhstani archives from the 1990s onwards – and the publication of critical monographs and regional studies – has Kazakhstan's famine received sustained scholarly focus. This shift enabled historians to move beyond homogenizing or Ukraine-centered frameworks, recognizing the singular dynamics at play in the Kazakh context: the rupture of nomadic pastoral life, infrastructure-driven extraction, and distinctive regional variations in famine impact as elucidated by comparative research on the northern and southern Aral Sea region.

The historiographical evolution is further marked by methodological diversification. Recent foreign scholarship has leveraged oral histories and survivor testimonies to challenge persistent myths about a supposed dearth of firsthand accounts, revealing instead the profound psychological, cultural, and symbolic rupture experienced by those who survived the catastrophe. These narratives underscore the famine as more than a demographic event, instead constituting a watershed in Kazakh memory, identity, and cultural continuity.

In addition, the manipulation and politicization of demographic statistics by Soviet authorities has emerged as a central research theme, particularly through critical re-examination of the 1939 Soviet census, which obscured the true scale of Kazakh losses and complicated post-famine ethnic and national dynamics.



This deliberate data distortion continues to shape both scholarly discourse and the politics of remembrance in independent Kazakhstan.

Foreign perspectives bring a critical comparative lens to the analysis of the famine, drawing attention to both its similarities with and divergences from other contemporaneous crises in the Soviet Union. The extensive work of scholars employing diplomatic archives and international sources has clarified that non-Soviet observers grappled with both incomplete information and ideological bias, yet they still recognized the scale of disaster and questioned Soviet intent. Moreover, modern historiographical analyses highlight the manner in which Soviet authorities consciously manipulated demographic records and public memory to obscure the disaster's true extent and reshape the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan. Over time, the famine has come to occupy a contested space within both academic and public discourses: as seen in art, literature, and education, narratives oscillate between depoliticized commemoration and assertions of genocide or ethnocide, often reflecting broader debates about identity, nationhood, and the legacy of repression in the Soviet period.

This pluralism of interpretations is further heightened by recent research into the experiences of survivors, which demonstrates the famine's lasting cultural and psychological impact while dispelling myths regarding the paucity of primary testimonies. The collapse of societal bonds and emergence of sustained trauma, reflected in both oral histories and symbolic cultural productions, emphasize the multidimensional repercussions of the event beyond the immediate demographic catastrophe. These findings collectively point to a growing recognition in foreign historiography of the famine's pivotal role in shaping modern Kazakhstan and the urgent need for rigorous, nuanced engagement with its causes, consequences, and representation.

Debates over intent and causality persist as major points of contention among foreign historians. While there is broad consensus about the catastrophic impact of Soviet policy in Kazakhstan, scholars diverge over whether the famine constitutes genocide, ethnocide, or primarily a case of structurally induced mass violence. Non-Soviet diplomatic sources reflect this plurality, often probing the underlying motivations of Soviet leadership, the role of conflict between the state and rural populations, and the interaction between nationality policies and food crisis dynamics. The work of Davies and Wheatcroft remains pivotal for its rigorous assessment of motivations and responsibilities, though it too has spurred critical rejoinders regarding leadership intent and the limits of available evidence.

The politics of commemoration – both in Kazakhstan and the international arena – provides further evidence of the famine's enduring significance. Contemporary Kazakh public art and historical discourse reflect competing narratives: official representations emphasize humanitarian tragedy while independent and nationalist perspectives are more assertive in invoking the language of genocide – a rhetorical divergence that often outpaces differences in the underlying factual accounts. This tension between politicization and scholarly caution is itself a testament to both the lasting trauma of the famine and the challenges of integrating it into global discussions of twentieth-century mass violence.

Contemporary foreign historiography increasingly recognizes the Kazakh famine as a paradigmatic case of how ideologically motivated state intervention can generate catastrophic social transformation – a narrative now rooted in expanded archival evidence, interdisciplinary approaches, and the recovery of survivor memory. Yet the field remains unsettled, shaped by ongoing disputes over terminology, intent, chronology, and the best methods for reconstructing the past. Continued research, especially incorporating Kazakh-language sources, regional oral traditions, and collaborative international inquiry, is essential for deepening our understanding of both the historical event and its reverberations in national and global consciousness. The historiographical rehabilitation of the Kazakh famine thus stands as not only a corrective to earlier neglect but also as a lens for interrogating the intersections of state power, violence, and the construction of collective memory.

Despite recent advances, several unresolved issues and critical research gaps remain, underscoring the necessity for a multi-layered, interdisciplinary approach moving forward. Firstly, the ambiguity surrounding the chronology, exact geography, and scale of the famine, including contested population loss figures and patterns of migration, warrants further archival investigation and demographic reinterpretation, especially drawing on recent access to Russian and Kazakhstani sources. Integrating methodologies from historical demography, regional studies, and geographic information systems could significantly refine our understanding of the event's scope.

Second, the complexity of leadership perceptions and the intent behind Soviet policy persists as a central historiographical debate. Future research should strive for deeper analytical engagement with the question of intent, not only through examination of state archives, but also by using comparative genocide studies frameworks to clarify whether the Kazakh famine should be classified as genocide or as a consequence of



systemic socio-political conflict. This line of inquiry is especially important given the evolving political and legal implications of such classification in international contexts.

Third, expanding the analysis to include the role of public commemoration and artistic representation, especially independent and grassroots efforts, can deepen our understanding of the ongoing negotiation of historical memory within Kazakhstan. An interdisciplinary approach that draws from cultural studies, art history, and memory studies will enhance appreciation for how the famine's remembrance continues to shape Kazakhstani society and its global image.

Finally, increased comparative studies addressing the representation of the Kazakh famine in educational materials and public discourse, both within Kazakhstan and internationally, are needed to unravel how competing narratives emerge and are transmitted. Such research should examine curriculum development, textbook analysis, and the intersection of state-led and grassroots memory politics. By addressing these gaps, future research will be better positioned to provide a comprehensive, critically informed understanding of the Kazakh famine and its multi-faceted legacy, cementing its place within both national history and the broader context of twentieth-century human catastrophes.

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