

Kazak Refugees in Turkey  
A Study of Cultural  
Persistence and Social Change

# Kazak Refugees in Turkey A Study of Cultural Persistence and Social Change

by

Ingvar Svanberg



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### Abstract

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In the mid-1950s about 1,800 Kazak refugees settled in Turkey. They had left Xinjiang in the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s due to the political changes in China. They have developed into an ethnocommunity of about 5,000 living in Turkey including some working abroad in western Europe and USA. In the new environment the former nomads have been transformed into sedentary artisans and farmers. Economic changes during the decades in Turkey have resulted in the migration of the Kazak refugees from their former rural settlements in Anatolia to Istanbul. There they have gathered in segregated neighbourhoods. The study gives a detailed analysis of the social and economic adaptation to the new life and of the persistence of Kazak identity despite various stages of acculturation. They have been integrated into a multiethnic structure that still exists in Turkey. The work also provides information concerning their food culture, life cycle rituals, popular religious customs, as well as linguistic change. During the 1970s a contra-acculturative movement blossomed among the Kazaks in Turkey. Its causes and development are discussed in detail.

(Key Words: Kazaks, China, Xinjiang, Turkey, Minorities, Turkology, Ethnology, Ethnicity, Refugees, Immigrants)

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*And those who believe and have emigrated  
and struggled in the way of God,  
those who have given refuge and help,  
those in truth are the believers,  
and theirs shall be forgiveness and  
generous provision*

**Qur'an Sura II:218**

**To the memory of  
Professor Robert F. Harney  
(1939–1989)**

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The Kazaks in Turkey constitute an ethnocommunity of over 5,000 people. They originated from Chinese Central Asia (Xinjiang) and settled as refugees in Anatolia during the 1950s. This book discusses the development of how over three decades the former Kazak nomads have become successful immigrant artisans in bustling Istanbul. With detailed ethnographic descriptions concerning rituals, customs and food habits, the book analyses how the Kazak identity persists, while their social organization and cultural patterns are changing. The book also provides further understanding of the multicultural Turkey.

The book is continuation of the author's co-edited book *The Kazaks of China* (1988) in the same series.

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