

Forced Migration: Kazakh Refugees In China And The Problem Of Their Repatriation (1916–1927)

Yerkin I. Stamshalov¹, Gulzhaukhar K. Kokebayeva^{2*}

^{1,2} Department of World History, Historiography and Source Studies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4663-6349>; ²<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6638-4663>

*Corresponding Author: Gulzhaukhar K. Kokebayeva

Abstract. The purpose of this article is to examine the policy of the Soviet government towards the forced migration of the population of Kazakhstan in 1918-1936. In the last year of the war and the first post-war years, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of refugees. The vast majority of refugees were in an extremely difficult situation: they were left without protection, deprived of the care of their homeland, with no prospects of settling down and finding work. The International Committee of the Red Cross, with the help of other public organisations, took on the task of helping refugees. However, there was a group of refugees who were neglected by the international community. These were the people of Kazakhstan who fled to China during the uprising, revolution, civil war and Soviet modernisation of the economy. The main materials for our research were documentary sources studied by us in the archives. The study of the selected problem is based on structural and functional analysis. Here, the structure is represented by the Special Commission under the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR, and the function is considered to be the activities of this commission in organising assistance to migrants in China and their re-evacuation to their native lands.

Keywords: forced migration, refugees, refugeehood, re-evacuation

I. INTRODUCTION

An unprecedented increase in the number of refugees occurred during the final year of the war and the early postwar years. Vast numbers of displaced people found themselves in extremely difficult conditions: they were left without protection, deprived of the support of their homeland, and without any prospects for settling permanently or finding employment. Initially, the International Committee of the Red Cross, together with other charitable organizations, undertook efforts to address the refugee crisis. However, material assistance alone could not resolve the many challenges associated with refugees' lives in exile. Moreover, the funds provided by volunteer sponsors were quickly exhausted, making it necessary to establish a legal framework to regulate refugee issues.

As a result of correspondence between the Secretary-General of the League of Nations and the governments of member states, it was agreed to appoint a High Commissioner responsible for defining the legal status of refugees and organizing assistance for them. At a conference held in August 1921, the Norwegian scholar Fridtjof Nansen was appointed High Commissioner for Refugees. This proved to be an exceptionally successful choice, as Nansen already had extensive experience in this field, having previously worked on the repatriation of prisoners of war from Russia after the First World War. Owing to his devoted efforts, 447,604 prisoners of war of diverse nationalities were able to return to their families [1, p.4]. Dr. Fridtjof Nansen began his work by clarifying the legal status of refugees in host countries through the issuance of identity certificates and travel documents. He also sought to secure employment opportunities for refugees and to develop repatriation programs.

However, there was one group of refugees that remained largely overlooked by the international community, though it did receive assistance from its former homeland. This group consisted of the population of southeastern Kazakhstan who fled to China during the mobilization campaigns and the intensification of the uprising of 1916.

This study aims to examine the activities of state institutions of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Turkestan ASSR) in organizing the re-evacuation of Kazakh refugees back to their homeland. During the Soviet period, this issue was not the subject of specialized academic research; only certain aspects were addressed in monographs and articles whose authors pursued other research objectives.

The history of Kazakh refugees has been studied primarily by post-Soviet scholars. Discussions and debates on refugee issues within central and republican Soviet institutions, as well as the activities of the prominent Soviet statesman Turar Ryskulov in organizing assistance for nomadic populations in China, were examined by Ordaly Konyratbayev [2]. Natalia Ablazhei's book is devoted to the study of the main mechanisms of migration processes in the twentieth century [3]. The author analyzes the geopolitical and socio-economic causes behind the flight of Kazakhs, Uyghurs, and Dungans from Kazakhstan to China, as well as their subsequent return to their historical homeland due to persecution by Chinese authorities. In the first chapter, Ablazhei explores the history of Kazakh refugees in China and demonstrates the role of migration from the border regions of Kazakhstan from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century in shaping the Kazakh diaspora in Xinjiang [3, pp.8-32].

It is also important to note the article by Natalia Ablazhei and Yelena Nazemtseva, which, based on materials from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR, examines the situation of Kazakh and Kyrgyz migrants of 1916 in China, as well as issues related to the organization of financial assistance and their re-evacuation [4]. The article by Yurii A. Lysenko focuses on the activities of Soviet institutions involved in the re-evacuation of participants in the Turkestan uprising of 1916 from China [5]. Issues of border mobility and migrants' adaptation to local economic, social, and other conditions have been studied by Zulfiya Imyarova [6,7].

Certain aspects of the problem addressed in this study have also been discussed in monographs and articles whose authors pursued different research objectives — particularly works devoted to the history of the 1916 uprising, which marked the beginning of the mass movement of residents from Kazakhstan's border regions into China. Among the extensive scholarly literature on this event, special attention should be given to the collective monograph by an international group of authors [8]. This work analyzes the diverse causes and preconditions of the 1916 uprisings, as well as the extent to which external factors influenced the tragic events that unfolded across large territories of the Russian Empire.

Among foreign scholars who have addressed related issues, the works of Jörn Happel and Matthew J. Payne should be noted [9, 10]. However, the problem of the return of Kazakh migrants in the first quarter of the twentieth century, who were forced to flee to China, remains insufficiently studied in historical scholarship.

Materials and Methods. The primary sources for this research consist of documentary materials examined in the archives of Kazakhstan and Russia. The study is based on a systems approach, in which the object of research is viewed as part of a complex and dynamically organized system. The most effective theoretical framework for this analysis is the model proposed by Nikita N. Moiseev, which examines the development of systems through the interaction of two mechanisms: bifurcation and adaptation [11].

In this study, the mass flight of Kazakhs to China is considered a bifurcation mechanism, while the programs implemented by the Provisional Government and later by Soviet authorities to facilitate the return of Kazakhs function as adaptation mechanisms. The research also employs the structural-functional method, which helps to reveal relationships between changes in different aspects of the object of study and to understand the mechanisms of its development. Through this method, the

interdependence between Soviet economic modernization and forced migration in Kazakhstan is identified, as well as the causes of reverse migration.

II. CAUSES OF REFUGEE FLIGHT AND THE PROBLEM OF REPATRIATION IN THE IMPERIAL PERIOD

Mass forced migration of the indigenous population of southeastern Kazakhstan in the 20th century began with the uprising of 1916 and the mobilization of Kazakh men for labor service at the front, including trench digging and other tasks. The immediate trigger for the uprising was the imperial decree of June 25, 1916, which ordered the mobilization of the male population of Central Asia and Kazakhstan aged between 19 and 43 for rear-front labor during the First World War [12, pp.25-26].

In the 1870s, the Russian Empire entered a period of major reforms, including military reform. In 1874, a Manifesto introducing universal military service was issued, abolishing recruitment through the old conscription system and replacing it with compulsory service for all male subjects of the empire [13, pp.2-19]. According to this statute, a special provision exempted the Asian peoples of the empire, including Kazakhs of the Turgai, Ural, Akmola, Semipalatinsk, and Semirechye regions from military service. Instead, they were required to pay a special tax in lieu of conscription.

Therefore, the decree of June 25, 1916, was perceived by the local population as a violation of the established order in the eastern colonies of Russia since the military reforms. The causes of the uprising were rooted in the broader socio-economic and political conditions of Kazakhstan as a colony of the Russian Empire. The central issue in the confrontation between imperial authorities and the Kazakh population was land. The Resettlement Administration confiscated the most fertile pastures along rivers traditionally used by Kazakh nomads. Nomadic communities were pushed deeper into the steppe, into arid and infertile regions. This policy provoked widespread resentment, not only against the imperial authorities but often also against Cossacks and peasant settlers who were relocated to these areas.

By expropriating Kazakh lands, the Resettlement Administration increasingly ignored the interests of the indigenous population. Although Kazakhs still made up more than three-quarters of the local population, they viewed the seizure of their former summer pastures by settlers as a direct threat to their economic survival [14, p.219]. As a result, conflicts between the local population and settlers occurred regularly.

In this highly tense situation, the mobilization of Kazakhs for rear-front labor during the First World War served as the catalyst for a powerful protest movement that soon escalated into armed resistance.

The protests began on July 4, 1916, following the police shooting in Khodjent. Within a few days, the uprising spread across the Samarkand, Syr-Darya, Fergana, Transcaspian, Akmola, Semipalatinsk, Semirechye, Turgai, and Ural regions, encompassing territories with a population of over ten million people. The movement took various forms, ranging from mass demonstrations, abandonment of workplaces and farms, migration into remote steppe and mountainous areas, flight across the border, destruction of conscription lists, and attacks on administrative officials, to open armed uprisings, assaults on military detachments, and guerrilla warfare.

To suppress the rebellion, punitive expeditions were dispatched. The uprising, which erupted under wartime conditions, was crushed with exceptional brutality. The assistant to the Turkestan Governor-General reported that punitive detachments "systematically and deliberately exterminated women and children." As a result, by January 1917 the indigenous population of Semirechye had decreased by 20 percent, and in some areas by as much as 60 percent [15, pp.8-88; 16, p.293].

Following the suppression of the uprising, thousands of Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomadic pastoralists fled across the border into China. Many perished along the way due to harsh weather conditions, dangerous mountain passes, and pursuit by Tsarist troops. According to Richard Yang, by the end of October 1916, the number of Kazakh refugees in Xinjiang had reached nearly 300,000 [17, p.306].

After settling in China's border regions, Kazakh refugees found themselves in extremely difficult circumstances. Lacking permanent employment, most worked as day laborers, while a small number who owned horses engaged in transportation services. Having exhausted all their financial resources and receiving no assistance from the authorities of either country or from international organizations, the refugees—suffering from hunger and deprivation—were forced to sell their wives and children to Chinese residents [18].

Following the Provisional Government's declaration of political amnesty, government bodies began actively addressing the issue of the Semirechye refugees in China. The Russian representative in the Ili region and local Chinese authorities agreed to allocate three months to complete repatriation.

The organization of assistance to Kazakh refugees was undertaken by the Semirechye Executive Committee, established in late March 1917. From March 1917 onward, the re-emigration of Kazakhs from the Kashgar and Kulja districts of China intensified. On May 4–6, 1917, a meeting was held with the participation of representatives of the Turkestan and Semirechye committees, during which it was decided to direct the refugees returning from China to the Verny district [19]. It was also noted that, given the extremely desperate condition of refugees from the Kulja region of China, their return needed to be organized as soon as possible [19].

To organize food assistance for the refugees, a special commission headed by Ibraim Zhainakov was established. The commission received 100,000 rubles from the Turkestan Committee to purchase provisions [20]. In effect, this represented the first official initiative of the Provisional Government's Turkestan Committee aimed at supporting refugees. By the end of May 1917, the repatriation of approximately 160,000 Kazakh refugees from the Ili region had been completed [17, p.308].

At the same time, numerous private initiatives emerged to assist refugees and returnees. The newspaper *Qazaq* closely followed developments related to the refugee crisis. On November 3, 1917, it published an article titled "Kirghiz-Kazakh Refugees," in which the author compassionately noted that "Kashgarian Sart people, Dungans, and Chinese took women from impoverished and starving Kazakhs and Kyrgyz; some women were even sold by the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs themselves under the threat of death by starvation" [21]. In the same issue, a letter from refugees, former residents of the Zharkent district, was published: "From the fourteen volosts of the Zharkent district, many fled into Chinese territory. Our property and livestock were plundered by Kalmyks. Many of us were shot. Many died of hunger and cold. Chinese and Kalmyks flogged people for trivial reasons. Any Chinese could take our wives. ... As soon as the long-awaited freedom arrived, those who survived rushed back to their homeland. Along the way, many of us perished again. Fathers lost sons, mothers lost daughters. For us, it was the end of the world. For example, in the Merke volost there had been 4,469 families; today only 310 families remain" [21, p.433].

The Turkestan Committee of the Provisional Government allocated 200,000 rubles for the purchase of food and other necessities for refugees returning from China to Semirechye [22]. By the autumn of 1917, it became clear that a portion of the refugees would not be able to return before the onset of cold weather. The Chinese authorities agreed to allow them to remain until spring, on the condition that the refugees in the Ili region submit to Chinese administrative control [23].

The Provisional Government also conducted negotiations with Chinese authorities regarding the repatriation of refugees. Due to the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in China's border regions, the Chinese side was likewise interested in their prompt return. However, subsequent political developments in Russia, including the establishment of Soviet power and the escalation of civil conflict, disrupted these plans. As a result, large-scale official repatriation was never fully implemented.

III. CAUSES OF REFUGEE FLIGHT AND THE PROBLEM OF REPATRIATION IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

The next wave of Kazakh migration was associated with the 1917 Revolution, the Civil War, and the famine of 1920-1921. The famine of 1920-1921 resulted from a combination of a snowless winter followed by a dry summer, as well as the severe economic conditions in the country caused by the policy of "War Communism." This policy involved the elimination of private enterprise, the nationalization of industry, compulsory labor service, and the food requisition system. Together, these measures dealt a serious blow to the national economy, particularly to the agricultural sector. In pastoral nomadic and semi-nomadic regions, extreme weather destroyed pastures and hayfields.

By May 1922, the number of people affected by famine in Kazakhstan had reached 2,832,000 [24]. The famine also led to the spread of infectious diseases, including typhus, cholera, plague, scurvy, and others. The number of infected individuals far exceeded the capacity of the republic's medical institutions. Hunger resulted in high mortality rates, while poverty, epidemics, and the shortage of hospitals further exacerbated the situation [25, p.727-728].

The population of Kazakhstan's border regions with China also suffered from raids carried out by armed groups that had fled toward the frontier and engaged in looting and banditry. Hunger and fear forced Kazakhs in the Semipalatinsk and Semirechye regions to flee once again across the border into China. In 1921, approximately 5,575 Kazakh refugees were living in China [4, p.17].

Local authorities of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Turkestan ASSR) began addressing the issues of refugee return and employment. By decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR dated February 3, 1920, a Special Commission was established to deal with the settlement of Kyrgyz (Kazakh) refugees. The establishment of the Special Commission on Refugee Affairs as an institution under the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR indicated that the republican government had intensified assistance to refugees and adopted more decisive measures for their return and resettlement.

The importance attached to addressing the refugee issue was evident from the fact that some members of this commission were recalled from the army and exempted from military service to participate in this work [26, p.149]. A special commission was tasked with organizing assistance for refugees in China and preparing their repatriation, so that "all Muslims of the Semirechye region who were forced to flee from the brutal tsarist punitive forces or as a result of ethnic hostility into Chinese territory or other areas might be able to return safely to their former homes and peacefully enjoy their previous lands and homesteads" [27].

The Special Commission was tasked with operating in Chinese regions where refugees were concentrated. To facilitate its work, local branches (commissions) were created in the regions of Xinjiang. These local commissions were responsible for organizing material assistance to refugees. In March 1920, the Special Commission under the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR allocated funds to the local commissions in Kulja (Yining) and Kashgar to pay for the liberation of refugees purchased by Chinese citizens. The allocated amounts included 2.1 million rubles in old Russian

currency from the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, 2.1 million rubles in currency issued by the Kerensky government, and 1 million Soviet rubles. In addition, 10 million Soviet rubles were allocated for the purchase of food and other necessities for refugees [28]. To explain the conditions of return to Soviet territory and to conduct outreach and agitation work among Kazakh and Kyrgyz refugees, Soviet officials originating from the indigenous population of the Semirechye region were sent to Xinjiang [29].

The severe living conditions of the refugees, marked by hunger and disease, forced many to sell their children and women to Chinese residents. Nearly all those who survived famine and illness sought to reclaim their relatives and children. However, not all Chinese citizens agreed to return them, and the need to negotiate with local Chinese authorities required elevating the status of the Special Commission. On July 17, 1920, the commission was reorganized into the "Special Commission under the Council of People's Commissars of the Turkestan ASSR" and was granted the following powers:

1. To enter into negotiations with relevant Chinese authorities regarding both the freedom of exit of Kyrgyz (Kazakh) refugees from China and the assistance of Chinese authorities in redeeming women and children sold by refugees to private Chinese citizens;

2. To evict all illegal occupants from houses, homesteads, and landholdings belonging to returning refugees and restore these properties to their former owners, wherever possible together with livestock, tools, crops, and other assets;

3. To provide refugees with initial assistance in the form of money, transportation, food, clothing, and footwear, both within China and during their journey back to their places of residence;

4. To redeem at state expense all women, children, and other family members of refugees held in servitude by Chinese citizens [30].

The work of the Special Commission was complicated by the ongoing Civil War in Semirechye and by the continued presence of the old Russian diplomatic structures in Xinjiang, while representatives of the new Soviet authorities had not yet been recognized by the local Chinese administration. Under these conditions, between February 2 and March 10, only 500 refugee families managed to return to their homeland [31].

On May 27, 1920, a meeting was held in Kulja with representatives of the RSFSR and China. On the Russian side, authorized officials from the Department of Foreign Relations and Foreign Trade participated, while the Chinese side was represented by the Ili Daoyin, the head of the Diplomatic Bureau, and the Kulja District Chief. During the meeting, "two issues were discussed: 1) the relations between the two neighboring republics: Russia and China; 2) the return of refugees and Cossacks residing within the territory of the Republic of China to Russia" [32, p.547].

The meeting concluded with the following decision: "In view of the fact that the command of the Turkestan Front has issued an order granting amnesty to all Russian subjects who opposed Soviet authority, which is binding on all institutions and officials of the Turkestan Republic, the Soviet authorities will take all measures to receive refugees and amnestied individuals and provide them with opportunities for peaceful labor. The Chinese authorities, in turn, pledge to take all measures to facilitate their return to Russian territory. The Ili authorities have agreed to include one representative of the Soviet authorities in their Refugee Commission at the Diplomatic Bureau" [32, p.547-548].

The difficult situation of refugees in China's western regions was further complicated by the invasion of the White Army, which had been defeated on Soviet territory. The units of Andrey Bakich, violating international law concerning internees, not only refused to surrender their weapons but also attacked border settlements in China, looting property belonging to Chinese citizens. On May 17, 1921, an agreement was reached between the command of the Turkestan Front and the Xinjiang authorities regarding the entry of the Red Army into Chinese territory to conduct a joint operation

against Bakich's White forces. The Turkestan Front command undertook to immediately withdraw Red Army units to Soviet territory after eliminating the White forces in Xinjiang.

As a result of the Chuguchak operation in May-June 1921, Bakich's army was defeated, but destruction was not achieved; some White forces retained their strength and retreated to the Altai region. The Red Army units were promptly withdrawn from Chinese territory [33, pp.57-59]. These events positively influenced the development of mutually beneficial relations between Soviet Russia and China. At the same time, the continued presence of part of the White Army in Xinjiang concerned the Chinese authorities. To deprive the White forces of social support, the Chinese authorities proposed that the Soviet side declare amnesty for refugees and White soldiers and allow them to return to Russia [33, p.60].

Earlier, on May 1 and November 6, 1920, the All-Union Central Executive Committee had adopted decrees granting amnesty to certain categories of individuals who had opposed Soviet authority [34, pp.188-190]. It was now decided that no additional decree was necessary. Indeed, refugees from Semirechye who had ended up in Xinjiang without means of subsistence, forced to serve as unpaid labor for local entrepreneurs were unconcerned with the question of amnesty; they were willing to return to the Soviet state under any conditions.

A report by the Myrzatay-Karasuy Aul Revolutionary Committee, dated February 7, 1921, noted: "To date, 1,147 individuals have been registered. Kazakh and Kyrgyz refugees continue to arrive daily, cold and hungry; along the way, there have even been cases of death from starvation... The population treats the authorities with trust" [35].

As a result of the active work of the Special Commission, significant experience was gained in addressing the problem of refugee repatriation. On November 19, 1921, a meeting was held with the participation of representatives of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID) of the RSFSR and three representatives of the refugees. The NKID representative Kazansky informed the refugee delegates of the main principles of Soviet policy regarding refugees:

"Soviet Russia seeks to rectify the injustices committed against the Kyrgyz by the tsarist government and has implemented, and continues to implement, a series of reforms to eliminate the hardships inflicted on the Kyrgyz by the former colonial policies of that government, which had seized their best arable and pastoral lands in favor of artificially settled populations. Particularly significant reforms have been undertaken regarding land, as the restoration of the destroyed households of nomads is a moral duty of Soviet Russia. Other measures have also been taken to facilitate the return of refugees, and some have returned to Russia; however, not all have done so. Consequently, there are reasons preventing their return to their homeland; some of these, such as debt and servitude, we are aware of, and we now ask you to indicate those reasons of which we are not aware" [8, p.412].

During the meeting, refugee representatives reported on the numbers of Kazakh and Kyrgyz refugees and outlined the obstacles preventing their return. In his speech, the NKID representative noted:

"We divide all refugees into three categories: 1) refugees of 1916, that is, Kyrgyz; 2) refugees of 1918-1919, when Taranchi, Dungan, and some Kyrgyz left; and 3) refugees from military units who crossed into China during retreats and were interned there. I propose that we discuss the refugee issue at this meeting as it concerns the Kyrgyz, dividing it into several separate questions in the following order: 1) inconsistent data regarding the number of Kyrgyz refugees; 2) causes of indebtedness, the total sum, and possibilities to defer immediate repayment; 3) the number of people in bondage or servitude, including cases of sale; 4) other reasons preventing the return of refugees to their homeland" [8, p.413]. Refugee representatives Yakubbaev, Ailchinov, and Bekimov

provided detailed information on the conditions of refugees in western China and in Kulja [8, pp.415, 416, 418].

The political aspect of refugee status and categorization was also central to the attention of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR. When White Army forces interned in China ceased to pose a threat to Soviet authority, the NKID agency in Central Asia reported that "there is no basis for dividing refugees into categories depending on the time of flight" [36]. Regarding the number of refugees in Xinjiang, the report of the NKID representative in Kulja provided the following figures: "Before the departure of refugees to Soviet Russia, up to 150,000 refugees, including those in Kashgar, resided in the Xinjiang province. At present, according to experts on this matter, in the Ili region, including the Vorotalinsky district and Tarbagatai, up to 33,000 Kyrgyz remain... In the Uchturfan, Aksu, and Kashgar districts, there are up to 2,000 yurts (approximately 12,000 people), 2,000 individual Taranchi from the Zharkent and Verny districts, and 1,500 Dungan, almost exclusively from Przhevalsky and Verny districts, settled across the Xinjiang province (Hami, Guchen, Karashar, Aksu, Uchturfan, Kuchi, and Ili cities), totaling up to 8,000 people. Thus, the total number of refugees in Xinjiang province is estimated at 46,360" [8, p.423]. Despite various obstacles imposed by Chinese authorities, the return of refugees continued between 1921 and 1923. By 1923, approximately 50,000 refugees remained in China, representing roughly one-third of all those who had arrived [8, p.423].

Once the issue of refugee re-evacuation had been resolved relatively successfully, the most pressing concern became the return of refugees' property, which by that time had come into the possession of other individuals. Refugees arriving with their families found themselves in a state of extreme deprivation: without land, shelter, livestock, or clothing. The lands they had abandoned were occupied by impoverished Kazakh and Russian settlers [37]. On February 3, 1921, the Semirechye Regional Military-Revolutionary Committee issued an order regulating the procedure for returning to refugees the property they had owned between 1916 and 1920. The order contained a strict warning that individuals who refused to return property to refugees would be deported beyond the borders of the Turkestan ASSR and that their property would be confiscated [38]. To ensure that property restitution was carried out legally, a system of registration was introduced through a special commission responsible for documenting property subject to return. Once the commission's decision was approved by the competent authorities, the refugee family would recover its property.

The return of refugees from Semirechye to their homeland continued almost until 1927; however, the Special Commission under the Council of People's Commissars of the Turkestan ASSR functioned only until mid-1921. Due to the worsening financial situation in the Semirechye region, local financial institutions requested reductions in expenditures related to the Commission's activities. On August 18, 1921, at its 40th meeting, the Special Commission discussed its own liquidation. Responsibility for refugee settlement and the restitution of their property was transferred to local district refugee commissions. Nevertheless, as the repatriation process continued, the need for centralized management and coordination of refugee reception remained. This complex task was therefore assigned to the regional executive committee [39].

It is particularly important to note that the repatriation of Kazakh and Kyrgyz refugees organized by the Soviet authorities acquired a distinctly class-based character. For example, the operations of reception and relief centers and the assistance they provided were differentiated according to the social and property status of the returnees. "Wealthy" refugees were deprived of all forms of support except for food supplies, while impoverished refugees, in addition to food, received various types of assistance, including means of transportation and essential goods, as well as materials for clothing and footwear [40, p.119].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The local population of southeastern Kazakhstan that fled to China between 1916 and 1921 found itself in extremely difficult circumstances. In this desperate situation, assistance first came from the Provisional Government of Russia and later from the Soviet authorities, represented by the Special Commission on Refugees established by the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR. Although the Provisional Government and the Soviet government were historical opposites, they shared a common position on one crucial issue - the provision of assistance and the repatriation of Semirechye refugees from China. This convergence stemmed from their similar approach to migration issues, as both adhered to principles of humanitarianism and the idea of supporting compatriots. Historical narratives sometimes introduce important corrections into historiography. The activities of the Special Commission of the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR demonstrate that the support and efforts of the state—despite the severe hardships of the postwar years—to rescue compatriots from conditions of exploitation in a foreign land played a crucial role in enabling refugees to return to their native regions.

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