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**COMMON ETHNO-CULTURAL PATTERNS
OF KYRGYZ AND UZBEKS**



Cultural Heritage Book Series

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Cultural Heritage Book Series

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**COMMON ETHNO-CULTURAL
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OF KYRGYZ AND UZBEKS**

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Reviewer: Professor, Dr **S. Kaiypov**

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As Turkic-speaking peoples, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz share common history, culture and religion. Even though the Uzbeks have been the largest minority group in Kyrgyzstan, no in-depth research has been made on their cultural traditions. This monograph is the first study dealing with life cycle events, such as birth, children's upbringing, marriage and funeral rites of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and discusses how they are connected to diverse rituals, folk beliefs and superstitions. These ritualistic practices give meaning to those who practice them widely every day. The study is based on extended ethnographic research on local practices, knowledge and the oral histories of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, collected during ethnographic fieldwork in southern Kyrgyzstan. The research was conducted together with the author's students throughout a ten-year period between 2000-2010.

This work may be of interest to folklorists, historians, ethnographers, teachers, students and people who would like to better understand the local culture of two ethnic groups, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

It is a well-known fact that all living humans are the representatives of thousands of peoples and ethnic groups. They all together make up humanity. For instance, among today's global population, there are more than a billion Chinese people alongside barely a few thousand Tofa people¹. According to the Russian critic, V. G. Belinskii: "All peoples make a common chord in the historical life of mankind, each of them has a special voice; otherwise a chord would not have been built from similar voices". Our Kyrgyz ancestors correctly note that it is impossible to live apart from others, and that it is simply necessary to coexist with other different peoples. They have wise proverbs: "A lone horse does not leave dust behind, a lone man cannot become famous," "If two villages live side by side, their livestock shares one corral," and "If two contrasting winds come together, there will be frost, but if two peoples come together, there will be prosperity".

There are many representatives of different ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan, and they all live under the same environmental conditions and respect their homeland. The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have been living side by side in southern Kyrgyzstan for centuries and share similar, if not the same, languages, religion, sacred beliefs, markets and burial places. In addition, there has been a constant exchange of daughters between the two ethnic groups, thereby establishing inter-ethnic alliances.

One story that I heard during my student years constantly comes to my mind. Apparently, this happened in the early 1960s, in southern Kyrgyzstan. One Uzbek woman and one Kyrgyz woman both happened to give birth to their children in the local hospital of Nookat at around the same time. Before being discharged from the hospital, their children got mixed up, in the sense that the two newborn children were given to different mothers; the Uzbek mother got the Kyrgyz baby and the Kyrgyz one got the Uzbek child. When their children reached 12 years old, the mothers started recognizing differences in their children's physical appearances. For example, the Kyrgyz mother's child did not look like the rest of her children in the family; whereas the Uzbek mother's child looked Kyrgyz. The neighbors also started noticing the differences in the children's physical appearances. The husbands started to become more suspicious and on the basis of jealousy the parents started to fight and argue with one another.

Some villagers who knew both families started to recognize familiar features in both children; and saw how one child looked like the family from another neighborhood and vice versa. After some time, the two mothers got to know one another and started

¹ The Tofa people are a small Turkic speaking people who live in the Irkutsk province of Russia.

talking about their children's births during the same period. They recognized each other after many years and remembered how they used to be in the same hospital room and used to talk a lot about their family lives. The mothers decided to introduce their children to one another. The Uzbek child raised in the Kyrgyz family was brought to the Uzbek family; while the Kyrgyz child raised in the Uzbek family was brought to the Kyrgyz family. To a big surprise, both children looked like their own biological father, mother, and siblings. The mothers were also astonished to see the children's similarities to their biological relatives. After some family negotiations, they decided to take their own biological children back.

What was truly interesting started only after this event. After three or four days the children could not get used to their own biological parents and returned to live with their so-called '*social*' parents. The children did not listen to their biological mothers and preferred to live with the families who raised them since birth. The biological parents tried to take them back and this was repeated several times but with little avail. As such, the parents gave up convincing their biological children to return to their new homes. Moreover, it was not easy for their parents to be away from their children for a long time and missed them in their absence. Both the Uzbek and Kyrgyz parents got together again and agreed that it would be good if the children decided for themselves where they wanted to live. Of course, the children chose to live with their accustomed families, but it was agreed that they had to visit on a regular basis their biological parents, siblings, and relatives, in order not to lose social ties with them.

Both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks belong to the world's Turkic-speaking population and share a similar language, history, culture, and religion. In southern Kyrgyzstan, the size of the population is more or less equal between the two ethnic groups. Even though Uzbeks and Kyrgyz have been living side by side for centuries, their culture has not been studied from a comparative perspective. Among ethnographers, there is saying that 'if one understands only one ethnic group, this means one does not understand any ethnic group and its culture'. The meaning behind this statement is that it is impossible to understand one ethnic group without inquiring about the traditions of other peoples.

Through comparative research, one can see similarities and differences between the objects under investigation. These similarities and differences highlight the friendship of people and peaceful coexistence of two or more groups under the same environmental conditions. But of course, differences can also be used by external forces or interest groups to start conflict and misunderstandings between people, even though the people themselves value their own differences as unique qualities.

This monograph was born with the title 'The common ethno-cultural patterns of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks' based on the above-mentioned ideas and thoughts. It aims to comparatively understand the life cycle events and folk beliefs of two ethnic groups in southern Kyrgyzstan. It should be noted that I was born and raised in southern

Kyrgyzstan. The monograph contains reflections of my life-long knowledge, academic research, and personal experiences. The mentalities, worldviews, everyday lives, and cultures of the two ethnic groups are not foreign to me; instead they are familiar and well-known to me as part of my own everyday life. During my childhood, all the rituals and folk beliefs were part of my own socialization process, but later these cultural patterns became the aim of my participant observation, scientific studies and academic research.

The specific aim of this study is to look closely at ‘family-related rituals’ like birth, children’s upbringing, marriage, and funeral rites and how they are connected to diverse folk beliefs and superstitions and give meaning to the lives of people who have practiced them widely on a daily basis for many centuries. These cultural patterns assist people to live in peace and contribute to symbiotically co-existing with one another.

This study of the ‘family related rituals’ of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks hopes to contribute to a better understanding not only of these groups, but also of other peoples in other parts of the world. As human history shows, conflict does not occur between two ethnic groups who have been living side by side for centuries, unless external forces cause conflict for the local population.

The monograph is based on extended ethnographic research, local practices, knowledge and the oral histories of people mainly collected during ethnographic fieldwork in southern Kyrgyzstan. The research was conducted together with the author’s students throughout a ten-year period between 2000-2010.



CHAPTER 1

COMMON PATTERNS IN KYRGYZ AND UZBEK WEDDING TRADITIONS

The Tradition of *Kudalashuu* [establishing affinal ties]

In the field of ethnography, there is a separate branch of research that focuses on life cycle events, such as birth, children's upbringing, marriage, and funeral rites, and how they are connected to diverse rituals, folklore and superstitions. These ritual practices give meaning to those who practice them widely on a daily basis. Usually, people are consciously and unconsciously constrained by their culture, beliefs and rituals.

Among Kyrgyz

This section explores the wedding ceremony, including rituals around the marriage negotiations and the establishment of affinal relationships between *kudas* [in-laws] amongst ethnic Kyrgyz. Since marriage is one of the most important steps in life, a lot of attention has been paid to this ritual. There are customs regarding marriage arrangements, negotiations, the offer of marriage, and the establishment of affinal relationships referred to as *kuda tūshüü*. It is important to mention two types of marriage offer, *bel kuda* and *beshik kuda*, among Kyrgyz, where the opinions of the marrying couple are not taken into account; but rather the parents arrange their children's marriage. *Bel kuda* takes place even before the birth of children, whereas *beshik kuda* is performed when the children are still in the cradle, as the name *beshik* ("cradle") indicates. The marriage is planned with a specific person in mind from a young age. Usually these old types of affinal ties (*kudalashuu*) are established among those people who are close and have known each other for a long time. By going beyond their children's will, parents seek out to strengthen their friendship and alliances with other parents, but at the same time they put faith in their children and hope that their future sons and daughters would consider their proposals.

This kind of practice can be convenient for both sides: the father can prepare the bride-wealth, *kalyng* for his future daughter-in-law early and pay it off within many years, and over the years the expenses can be paid unnoticed, or without constituting a huge burden. The preparation of the girl's dowry, *sep* takes many years, which takes into account her own contribution. Parents of such marriage negotiations enjoy an extended good affinal [in-law] relationship until their children grow up and

get married, by participating in different kinds of life cycle events together. If one of the children's parents passes away, the mutual affinal agreements and marriage negotiations remain unchanged. If the young people reach marriageable ages and one dislikes the other, the parents may nevertheless try to convince them to get married. Otherwise, the young couple can follow their own choices. If a girl does not like the pre-chosen boy, the advance payment of bride-wealth is returned, but if a boy does not like the girl, the advance payment is not returned to the boy's family.

Kyrgyz ritual practices have never gone against the will, freedom, and rights of individual people. When a boy reaches marriageable age and has not promised anyone marriage, the parents start searching for a potential girl for marriage in his place. In the past, people tried to marry off their children early in order to encourage having children at a young age, so that the parents and children would grow together and be supportive of one another and share domestic and other work-related tasks. As the proverb states, "don't consider a bull as your cattle, and don't consider a single man as your son," single men were not viewed positively. Single adult daughters were called black backs (*kara daly*), a derogatory term referring to the multiple braids worn by unmarried women.

As a result of a centuries-long practice, Kyrgyz follow a strict incest taboo that prohibits marriage within the same family, distant relatives, and even lineage members. They are aware of the consequences of incestuous marriages, which can result in weak descent groups, sick children, birth defects, as well as mentally handicapped children. Therefore, ethnic Kyrgyz do not marry cousins within seven generations (patrilineal descent pattern), and therefore often recruit wives from far-away areas and preferably from a different lineage group. The following proverb highlights the importance of the prohibition to marry within seven generations: 'the descendants of women from the same village are equal to very thin and skinny dogs, the descendants of women from the same region are equal to wolves, and the descendants of women from outside of one's region are equal to lions.' Every Kyrgyz son is expected to know his own seven forefathers. One of the aims of this genealogical knowledge is to prevent the marriage of close relatives.

Fathers who plan to marry their sons off approach the potential girl's family with the news of *juuchu*. This is a matchmaking ritual in which the father or additional representatives of the boy's family, consisting of three or four people, enter the house of a girl with the aim to see the girl, meet members of her family, and see the house where the girl was raised. There are two ways of *juuchu* matching. First, reputable, elderly, and well-known people arrange marriages for their own sons or daughters themselves. Second, they might not go themselves, but rather ask insightful and experienced people to help them search for a potential partner for their own sons.²

² This can be observed while reading fairy tales, legends, and genealogical stories of ethnic Kyrgyz people. Apparently, people believe in special fortune tellers who inform in advance whether one's daughter will give birth or not and what kind of children they will bring up in the future. This aspect of fortune-telling has been accepted as one of the greatest art.

When assessing a girl as a potential marriage partner, the appointed person looks not only at her physical appearance, but also at the way she behaves in front of the guests; the way she talks, how she serves the guests, what kind of food she cooks, and how well she performs her domestic tasks. All these qualities are taken into consideration. Moreover, there is an additional fundamental principle, represented by the proverb: 'do not marry a wife but rather see her natal families and relatives (i. e. affines)'; which means that one should take into account the girl's parents and family status within the community as well. This is also an occasion for the girl's family members to meet their potential affinal relatives and get to know their background and family history.

There is one occasion in local folklore that illustrates the importance of assessing a girl as a potential wife. Once, a father who was searching for a girl for his son entered the family house of one girl. When the girl fulfilled all the requirements and it was time to establish affinal ties, the girl's parents were told: 'we have a son and you have a daughter'. Suddenly, the girl started laughing loudly at a joke told by her younger sister, in front of her potential father-in-law. The personal qualities of this girl, who expressed her emotions openly in public, were not accepted by the boy's family; therefore, the boy's father found various reasons not to inform the family about his initial intentions and left the girl's house.

If a boy's family members find a potential girl and are sure that they want to take this girl as his bride, a close member of the family selects the most respected relatives by age and social status (such as elderly male members of the family, *aksakal*, community leaders, and people with oratorical skills) in order not to avoid a rejection from the girl's family. Upon their arrival, they are not to speak of the aim of their visit, but rather to enjoy the hospitality of the girl's family and to praise the host family for their hospitable qualities. These people then inform of their intentions by citing proverbs such as 'you should give *koumiss* (fermented mare's milk) to someone who asks to have a drink, you should give a daughter to someone who asks to take her', 'blessed ones receive *juuchu* guests, ill-fated ones receive complainants', '*juuchu* come to good people, chasers come to bad people'. Furthermore, another proverb is 'whoever has a daughter, he or she has moods or character'. These highlight the notion that parents have the right not to agree to give their daughters away immediately and can find different reasons to deny such requests. This aspect should always be present during the marriage negotiations; otherwise, this might also imply that the girl's parents were waiting to give away their daughters promptly to the first one who came to ask for her hand. But *juuchu* means that attempts to convince the girl's parents are not given up lightly; rather they keep going. Despite such efforts, if the parents decide not to give up their daughters, the girl's family should nevertheless be hospitable towards the envoy or *juuchu* by inviting them into the family house and giving them enough food and treating them as respectful guests. There is a rule which stresses the idea that these ambassadors are not to be killed, and that the envoys or matchmakers should not be insulted, meaning that the matchmakers are considered the local representatives of diplomacy and that their status is equal to that

of ambassadors. If ambassadors build relationships between countries, the *juuchus* do so between two potential affinal relatives or families.

The next process is building affinal ties, beginning right after the matchmaking ritual has finished, in which the *juuchu* tries to convince the girl's parents to give up their daughter. After the agreement is made, the father's family members approach the girl's family by putting their hands on their chests and saying "*Kuldugubuz bar, kuda*", which literally means 'we are expressing submission'. This implies that the boy's family is completely obedient towards the girl's family. The idea behind this is not only to ask for consent (from the bride's parents), but also to indicate the readiness of the boy's father and his relatives to do everything for the sake of the happiness of their children and to express their grace and love towards the future marital union. Having received consent for the marital union of the two children, the future parents of both children hug each other and, as a sign of their friendship and good luck for their affinal relationship as well as for their children, they taste something sweet together, such as honey, dried apricot, chocolate or other sweets.

Once the relatives from both sides know each other better, all kinds of marriage negotiations start, such as bride-wealth (*kalyng*), gifts of clothes (*kiyit*), dowry (*sep*), and wedding ceremonies. They will openly discuss these matters together and will try to reach an agreement. During this time the parents organize the engagement ritual. During this, the girl is given golden earrings, and by wearing these, it informs others that she has been taken. After this ritual, the girl and the boy are engaged. Today, Kyrgyz use golden earrings to mark the engagement ritual but in the old days, they valued silver earrings more. This was linked to the color of silver, which is close to white. Many ethnographers explain the importance of the color white as it is associated with milk among nomads, which served as the sign of prosperity, sacredness and survival. Therefore, the color white signified purity, cleanness, prosperity, honesty, and innocence among nomadic groups. In contrast, the color yellow had the meaning of sadness, suffering, and sickness.



*Mother in-law putting engagement earrings on her future daughter-in-law's ears.
(Photo by E. Köchümkulova).*

In cases where the bride-wealth and costs for the wedding ceremony are too high for the father, he can nevertheless comfort himself by saying that a new family member is joining the household; therefore, he will pay the bride-wealth according to what his affinal relatives ask for. In order to collect the bride-wealth, the boy's parents invite all his relatives and organize an additional feast. In the past, the nomadic Kyrgyz paid the bride-wealth with cattle, but the number of cattle depended on how many the girl's parents asked for. Those who were economically prosperous brought livestock in sets of nine, such as nine camels, nine horses, nine cows, nine bulls, nine sheep, and nine goats. Another important factor was a piece of white cloth tied to a horse's pigtails, the color of which is supposed to be white due to the positive symbolic meaning mentioned earlier.

The girl's parents also prepare a dowry before the marriage, for two reasons: first, the dowry is considered the girl's property; second, it makes it easier for the girl to enter a new family with her own belongings. To put it differently, she may find it hard to quickly become a member of the new family if needing to ask for money or the use of others' property, and so on. This transition from the natal family to the future husband's family requires some time. Bringing her own belongings gives her more freedom to move within the new household and to be independent from others, and to become more incorporated into the family's household. The girl's parents will try to make sure that their daughter has all the necessary household items. The dowry also increases the girl's status in the eyes of the groom's family and his extended relatives. In the old days, rich families used to give slaves as part of the dowry in order to overcome all household tasks and challenges related to labor, service and work. But for those who were poor, the parents would start saving for their daughters' dowries as early as possible, from their childhood.

A dowry can be a collection of art objects, such as: carpets, bedding, and jewelry, precious stones (rings, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, pendants, souvenirs, amulets, and other jewelry), horse tacks, home appliances, kitchen utensils, blankets, and clothing, etc. However, the dowry does not include cattle, because cattle are considered inheritance property after the father's death. Special attention is given to *kurak*, which is made of various fabric scraps sewn together, while the fabrics are of different colors, sizes, forms, and figures. These freedoms of choice afford the maker greater creativity. As the name indicates, *kurak* means to sew together or put together several pieces. The word can refer both to the finished product as well as to the process of making it. The idea behind *kurak* is also related to the newly-established marital union, in that their lives are to be sewn together and, as a result, children would be born, and thus it represents the establishment of a beautiful family. Therefore, as part of a dowry it is important to have blankets and pillows made in the style of *kurak*. The groom's parents prepare a yurt for the newlyweds, while the bride's parents make sure that the yurt is full of items.

It is important to move on to another custom related to marriage. According to a local legend, a wealthy elderly widower fell in love with a young girl; after which he sent an envoy or matchmaker *juuchu* to the girl's family. Even though the bride-

wealth was generous, the girl's father was worried about the groom's age. As a result, he decided not to give his daughter to the old man. When the old man heard about the refusal, he sent a horse with a white cloth tied around the pigtail as a sign of begging and for the girl's father to consider his request one more time. With this strategy, the girl's father could not resist and blessed the proposed marriage. This symbolic ritual was widely performed when a new stallion was brought to a herd of female horses, as a sign of welcoming and good luck.

The bride-wealth is important to highlight here, because it is one of the main bridges between two families in establishing a marriage. Despite its ban during Soviet times, bride-wealth has survived and still plays a crucial role in marriage negotiations as a part of Kyrgyz culture. Bride-wealth has been described as if a person is sold as a good; however, it has a much deeper meaning in the Kyrgyz culture as a sign of gratitude for bringing up a daughter, for hard work, and as compensation for the loss of labor that a girl provides her natal family. It is wrong to think of bride-wealth in terms of the purchasing of a human. The girl's parents spend the money and cattle received from the boy's parents for purchasing dowry. Since dowry plays an important role in a girl's married life, her parents fear people's judgement and do their best to give a good dowry.

Whether or not the girl receives a generous bride-wealth, her family will organize a bride farewell feast for her. As a proverb suggests, it is possible to give a girl in marriage without bride-wealth, but she should be married off according to traditions, which implies a bride farewell feast. The bride farewell feast is organized to suit her preferences, dignity, value, and status. This feast is organized for close family members, distant relatives, and community members, accompanied with food, music, and other entertainment activities. It is important that the feast is discussed in the community and remembered for a while, but the bride-wealth remains the business of the groom's and bride's families. There are a few proverbs which highlight the strength and value of affinal ties: *Kuda bolgucha kimdigingdi surash, kuda bolgondon kiyin kul da bolso syilash*, i. e., "Before establishing affinal ties, inquire about each other's family background, but once the affinal ties established, follow the rule to respect affinal relatives even if they are poor or slaves," *Dos jüz jyldyk, kuda ming jyldyk*, i. e., "Friendship lasts for a hundred years, but affinal ties last for a thousand years" and *Kuday koshkon kuda bolot, paygambar koshon dos bolot* i. e., "God blesses those who become in-laws, the Prophet blesses those who become friends."

Among Kyrgyz, *kыз узатуу*, meaning "the farewell of the bride" is widely practiced, and is a traditional ceremony representing the 'sending off' of a future bride. The girl's parents organize this feast at home for their own relatives and community members. Some wealthy families organize it somewhere else, for instance at a restaurant. There are also guests invited from the groom's side. The purpose of *kыз узатуу* is for the girl to bid farewell to her natal relatives, introduce the groom to his future relatives, and get blessings from her own community members. The girl's braid symbolizes her marital status: for instance, a single braid means that she has never been married, but

hair plaited in two braids means that she has been married before. In addition, the bride's female relatives will give all kinds of jewelry, such as earrings, rings, bracelets, and amulets, and all kinds of chains and pendants that serve as decoration. After this, the bride is taken to the home of the groom, where the festivities continue, this time with the groom's relatives.

Kyrgyz often organize wedding ceremonies in autumn, as harvest time is over, and the cattle are fattened, meaning that people have more free time. But the fundamental nature of nomadic people is their close relationship with their cattle and their mutual interdependence. Apparently, many cattle start mating in autumn; therefore, this time of the year also has symbolic significance for the relationship between humans and animals and their symbiosis. In addition, often Kyrgyz try to organize weddings on the day of a full moon and before the rain starts. The Kyrgyz hope that the weather will be sunny during wedding days, not only for practical reasons but also because this implies a positive sign for the newlyweds. If the weather is sunny, this means that the couple will have a long happy life. Therefore, young brides say to their children: 'if you eat the remains of food burnt to the bottom of the pot, the weather will be rainy during your wedding'. Therefore, brides do not give burnt food to their children.

Among Kyrgyz, the best way for a girl to express her affection towards a boy is by presenting a handmade handkerchief. Many vivid examples can illustrate this point, including its use in the practice of bride kidnapping and in the short stories of the famous Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, whose work is widely read and discussed both at home and abroad. Expressions of love are usually well observed in bride-kidnapping practices when parents did not give permission for young couples to get married. Such couples arrange their own marriages, thus bypassing their parents' strict rules and regulations. In the love story by Aitmatov entitled 'Cranes Fly Early', the heroes Sultan Murat and Myrzagül express their feelings and emotions quite openly.

Among Uzbeks

Among Uzbeks, life cycle events involve many relatives, friends, and other close people, because these are considered a joint responsibility. In other words, Uzbeks value a communal system, which can be regarded as the main core of Uzbek culture and everyday life. Popular Uzbek wishes and blessings are: "May our earnings/savings be used for feasts and celebrations!" and "Let us meet each other again at feasts!" The latter is said as people leave the feast. Uzbek feasts are organized in a joyful manner, accompanied by trumpets, folk theaters, and parodies that make people's mood more festive and celebratory. By observing the feasts, one can easily find out the hosting families' backgrounds, wealth, and statuses. Economically stable people can organize affluent feasts, while ordinary people can also do so by spending generously most if not all of their savings. This is linked to the fact that the organization of such feasts is considered to be the main goal of many people's lives.



*Items included
in the bride's dowry.
(Photo by the author).*

There is an Uzbek proverb which highlights that a girl's dowry preparation starts as early as possible, from childhood: *Kizingni beshikka sol, molini teshikka sol*, i. e., "Put your baby girl into the cradle and starts collecting for the dowry by putting all the necessary things into a dowry chest." The girl's parents usually make a sizable effort to organize a girl's farewell and cover the majority of the costs related to the marriage ceremony. This burden can be underlined with the proverb: *Kiz bergan odam kirk yil oziga kelolmaidi*, i. e., "Parents who have married off their daughters cannot recover for forty years." The financial costs of marrying a daughter can be so high, that many parents either start to prepare early or face not being able to afford their daughter's marriage ceremony.

On the one hand are the preparation of the dowry and the organization of the girl's feast; while on the other is the girl's upbringing, especially how she was brought up by her parents, relatives, and community members. The moral upbringing of daughters is largely, but not entirely, the parents' responsibility. As the proverb goes, a girl should be brought up by forty households (*kызга kыrk üydön tyiu*) which underscores that it is not the sole role of parents to bring up daughters but also that too of the relatives and neighbors. In an Uzbek *mahalla*, the community members know the character of their children and how they have been brought up. Therefore, many people can engage with the moral upbringing of daughters, because this concerns the reputation of their communities as well. Thus, the family and community are not separate domains, but rather part of a symbiotic relationship.

Here it is important to highlight that there is a big difference in the way boys and girls are brought up according to Uzbek traditions. If boys are naughty, this type of behavior is often ignored and not taken into consideration; however, this is not the case for girls. As such, parents try to keep girls under strict control. Moreover, mothers are given bigger roles and responsibilities for the upbringing of their daughters; while fathers are given bigger roles and responsibilities for the upbringing of their sons.

In Uzbek culture there is much folklore related to girls and their future marriage. Fathers are not allowed to beat their daughters; rather fathers should kiss their daughters' foreheads when a new moon rises. By doing so, daughters' future married lives would be happy. This also shows the sympathetic relationship between fathers and daughters. In addition, if daughters physically look like their fathers, it means that they will be happy in the future. Unmarried girls are not supposed to stare into broken mirrors or be beaten by kitchen utensils like rolling-pins; otherwise, they will not end up happily married and their marriage could end badly. If someone pulls a ring from a girl's finger, this implies that someone is taking away their happiness. Another interesting belief that likely came from the nomadic Uzbeks is that an unmarried girl is allowed at least one chance to ride a horse in order to reach her aims in life.

Men primarily look at women's eyes and their beauty. Uzbek women use diverse methods and techniques to make themselves more beautiful in addition to their naturally-given attractiveness. They may use a perfume-ocher, skin-whitener, *usma* (to color or dye eyebrows that is made from vegetables) and lipstick. It is rare to meet an Uzbek woman who does not dye her eyebrows with *usma*. There is some folklore related to *usma* as well, one of which highlights the importance of the linkage between two eyebrows with *usma*; otherwise parents could get into a fight or quarrel. If an unmarried girl's eyebrows are far from one another, this implies that she would get married somewhere far away; meanwhile, if a girl's eyebrows are close, this means that she would get married somewhere close-by. Generally, Uzbeks offer their daughters for marriage to people somewhere close-by due to their endogamous marriage practices. However, for girls, marrying far-away may also mean that they will not be able to regularly visit their parents, relatives, and community members. In order to prevent a marriage taking place somewhere far away, a girl links her eyebrows using *usma*. Moreover, another superstition relating to marriage is that if a girl eats the back of the bread, her future marriage be with someone from within her own community. Another one is that should the linkage between the two eyebrows weaken, the girl will have twins. Some women use oil made of rice pilaf (*osh*) to have black eyebrows. Unmarried girls are not allowed to clean away spider webs with a broom; otherwise, their married life could be difficult.

Much folklore is related to the arrival of *sovchilar* or matchmakers, a topic considered as positive, while it is typical to marry off daughters as early as possible among Uzbeks. One of those beliefs is related to the proper usage of *usma*, which can contribute to the speeding up of the arrival of *sovchis*. If a girl encounters a cockroach or spiders, loses a strand from her hair or dreams about getting new shoes, all of these can mean that the arrival of *sovchis* or matchmakers is imminent. If a girl eats meat when she begins to eat rice pilaf, this means that the girl's parents will give her to the first matchmaker that comes to their house. If a girl's food is salty, many would think that she has fallen in love.

If a boy slaps a girl with a dough roller, it means that a girl will not be happily married. Girls may curse such boys by telling them that they will be poor in their lives. In order not to stay at their father's house for a long time, girls have to follow some rules.

For example, a girl is not supposed to sit at the corner of a table, on shoes, on shelves, or on any threshold, otherwise this means she will get married late. Conversely, there are beliefs that could speed up the marriage process. For example, if a girl eats two pieces of bread at once, this implies the arrival of *sovchis* or matchmakers. In addition, if a girl combs or washes her hair on a Wednesday, this implies that there may be a sudden visit of *sovchis*. Married women are not allowed to comb their hair or take a bath on Wednesdays.

In the past, it was not possible for Uzbek girls and boys to openly date one another, since it was considered shameful behavior. Not only dating, but when a boy came of age, he could not openly inform his father of his marriage intentions. He could only express his willingness to get married by giving some indirect hints such as putting carrots into his father's shoes. Even though it is not so strict today, one can still see some restrictions in this regard. Usually Uzbek parents decide their children's fate and are trusted by their children in selecting a suitable partner. Sometimes, sons do not know in advance their potential bride, and the same can be said for girls. However, sons can suggest certain girls for the parents to then do some extra research about, and only after that may they ask for the girl's hand. Since marriage is endogamous among Uzbeks, most of the time marriage takes place among close relatives and within one *mahalla*. Marriage is often between two from the same city. Marriage for love is not widespread among Uzbeks, but mutual sympathy often occurs during the course of their joint life and after having had children. Therefore, many Uzbeks say that if a girl has a birthmark in her ears, this means that the girl will get married to her beloved. Since not all girls have birthmarks in their ears, this thus prepares girls to get married without love. Uzbeks are also aware of the importance of mutual respect as a main criterion for a relationship between spouses. Once they have these qualities, a stronger emotional relationship can then develop.

When a boy reaches a marriageable age, his parents, neighbors, and relatives start looking for a potential bride. Previously, a boy's family would start gathering information about a girl's family, and once this information was deemed satisfactory, matchmakers were sent to the girl's family. If the girl was well brought up and her parents had a good background, the groom's parents would send a *sovchi*. Usually the *sovchi* consisted of several women, from 3 to 5 of the groom's female relatives, and this group included the boy's mother, aunts, and other female relatives. They would come in order to propose marriage and would do so several times. Usually, the girl's family approves the proposal immediately, especially if *sovchi* eat meat together with rice pilaf, as this is considered a sign that a good family will come from the marital union. Within this short period of time, the girl's parents would also carry out their own background checks on the boy's family, and only if they are all satisfied would the girl marry. In obtaining this information, the *mahalla* members assist the girl's family as well as the boy's. Understandably, both sides try to show their best qualities to one another.

Uzbeks families may not immediately refuse matchmakers due to their hospitable nature, but, at the same time, they also fear potential gossips within the *mahalla* and

thus being at the center of attention. This refusal might raise more questions than answers and thus affect visits from future potential matchmakers, which can affect their daughter's fate in becoming happily married in the future. Marrying off daughters is also the parents' responsibility. In this sense, a short proverb says: 'wheat is destined to be at the mill, and the girl's fate is to get married'.

After receiving the parents' permission, the engagement process begins. The parents organize the ceremony of '*patir sindiruu*' (bread breaking), which signifies that the girl is to be engaged. *Patir* is a special type of bread, which is made of milk, flour, butter, and some ornaments of flowers. Usually matchmakers buy such round and flat breads wrapped in a tablecloth to be placed on a table. The girl's parents also present flat bread this way. One of the oldest matchmakers will put flat bread on both sides of the table and will break them together. This means that the girl and boy are engaged and both parents start the process of establishing affinal ties. The wedding day is then chosen and the bride's relatives give gifts to the matchmakers and the groom's relatives. This ceremony is still practiced. The *sovchi* (matchmaker) selects a day when the guests should come to the bride's house. Before the couple gets married, the boy's family offers gifts such as clothes, food, and daily essentials to the girl's family during the ceremony. In turn, the receiving side gives the same amount of gifts in the form of sweets, clothes and food. After this exchange, the two families can officially be considered potential affinal relatives.



Uzbek women holding food and fruits to be served to guests. (Photo by the author).

Before the official wedding ceremony, the couple's relationship is accompanied by various rituals. Once the potential affinal relatives arrive, they offer sweets to make their relationship sweet and burn leaves of juniper to make their relationship warm and cozy. From the engagement to the wedding ceremony, they greet each other by giving sugar (usually refined sugar) and by this they hope to make their affinal ties sweet. When the boy's parents go up to the girl's parents, they are first given sweet tea before some food, and the requirement is to drink the sweet tea in one go. This sweet tea is also accompanied by kind words and well wishes. These rituals are not limited to the symbolization of a 'sweet' life for the couple, but also a 'sweet' relationship between affinal ties. In contrast, in order to prevent a cold relationship, they try to avoid presenting each other with an onion or broom. The onion is the sign of bitterness and sourness, while the broom signifies dirtiness. Therefore, it is important that the affinal ties do not become dirty and bitter.

Once parents agree on the season of the wedding ceremony, the preparation and organization of the wedding begins. Usually, autumn is the best time for organizing wedding ceremonies because people have collected their harvest by that time and have enough money from their agricultural products. Wedding ceremonies are not celebrated during Ramadan, or during the month of *Sapar*, which is the second month according to the Islamic calendar. During this time, not only celebrations, but also travels are prohibited. In the old days, there was a ritual called *Sapar kachty*, meaning *Sapar* go away. People would dress up an old lady and would chase her until after she had left the village. Sometimes, they would chase a dog instead of an old woman. The aim of this ritual was to distance the bad aura from the village. These rituals have adapted to new realities yet play the same role in attempting to make the life of people more secure and avoiding the evil eye.

Before the wedding ceremony, affinal relatives start to prepare gifts of clothing for one another, which is a tradition known locally as *sarpoi*, which is a combination of the Persian words "sar" (head) and "poi" (feet). This refers to clothes from top to toe. Both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks use the term *sarpoi* to represent clothes symbolizing affinal ties. The clothes are prepared not only for affinal relatives but also for the young couple.

Several days before the wedding ceremony day, there is a frantic exchange of food and goods between affinal relatives. The girl's mother will also send some clothes and food (forty different kinds of food) to the groom's parents and the groom, which is a ritual called *mazar*. Additional food is prepared for the groom's friends, and the friends praise the groom by complimenting his dress and saying 'thank those who raised the daughter' and 'thank those who raised the son'. Meanwhile, the boy's family sends rice, flour, oil, carrots, and firewood to the girl's family. The girl's mother prepares dowry-related items such as kitchen utensils, clothing, blankets, and dishes. The boy's family sends cotton balls for making blankets, sit on mats and pillows to the girl's family.

Wedding Ceremony

Among Kyrgyz

The extent, character, and length of the wedding ceremony depend on the hosts' wealth and their economic position. But in general, the Kyrgyz want to share their wealth with other people and community members and to get their recognition for doing so³. They mobilize all of their resources in order to organize the feast, slaughtering their biggest cattle (horse, bull and several sheep), inviting more friends, and engaging more of their close and distant relatives and lineage members. The girl's side prepares her for moving to the groom's house by organizing the dowry for transportation. The groom is accompanied by his friends, taking the bride from her home.

For the Kyrgyz, the main dish during the wedding is *besbarmak*, which is eaten with five fingers, as the name indicates. This dish consists mainly of homemade noodles and boiled pieces of meat. First, a sheep is slaughtered by close male relatives. Afterwards, the bones and meat are chopped into several pieces, usually 12. Each bone with meat or *jilik* has its own symbolic meaning. They are boiled in a *kazan* (iron cauldron) until the soup and the bones with meat are ready to be distributed to the guests according to their status and authority. *Boorsok* (fried bread) and other dishes are also prepared. For weddings, the lineage brides get together and cook the bread in large quantities outside, above a firewood-burning stove.



Guests who will be attending a wedding celebration. (Photo by the author).

³ In the old days, economically stable families would organize wedding ceremonies up-to 30 days in order to get blessings from people but also to increase their socio-economic status.

During the wedding ceremony, representatives from both sides attend and sing songs, praise God, and express their well wishes and happiness. The wedding ceremony is also accompanied by different kinds of traditional games for young people organized by the hosts. These include traditional games such as *köz tangmai*, *ak chölmök*, *jooluk tashtamai*, and *el chabar*. There are two representatives: one from the bride's side, the brother's wife (*jenge*), and one from the groom's side, his friend who leads the feast. Usually they are selected on the basis of their oratory skills and creativity for finding words quickly and making people laugh. There are many other competitions; while games and performances are organized in order to make the feast festive and lively.

The Kyrgyz games are held in a relaxed atmosphere and the entertainment is diverse: young people sing songs and tell stories with humor, while the boys are acquainted with young women, whereby they can express their feelings to each other secretly. Before the bride's dowry can be collected by the groom's relatives, the bride's relatives demand a ransom (money or sheep) for the bride's dowry, which mainly consists of pillows, blankets and sit-on mats. This practice is called *töshök talashuu*, or fighting over the blankets.

There is another traditional sporting game called *kyz kuumai*, meaning the 'chasing a girl'. This consists of a horse race between a young woman and a young man. The idea behind this is for the boy to kiss the girl, while if the young man catches the young woman by the time of reaching the finishing line the young woman then has the chance to chase the young man back again. Both the groom and the bride can take part in this game as well if they wish to do so. Not only do young people participate in such games, but the newlyweds' parents and affinal relatives can also do so. A racehorse is given to young women, while a lazy and slow horse is given to young men. It has been suggested that the game was created in order to test young men, and thus it can be regarded as a ritual of sorts.



Kyrgyz traditional game, kyz kuumai, where a man chases after a girl. (Photo by Ammos Chapple).



A bride's dowry. (Photo by the author).

Even today, there are many different kinds of tests and challenges for the groom presented by the bride's side. In order to examine the groom's patience and persistence, the bride's young sisters start pinching the groom's ears. The groom is asked to chop wood and slaughter sheep, but the idea of this test is to see whether he can do these tasks creatively and skillfully by following the rules of how wood should be chopped, and sheep should be slaughtered. Just by looking at how the groom conducts various services is it possible to examine the future husband's personal qualities and characteristics.

Even after the groom has paid the bride-wealth and wants to take the bride to his home, he cannot arrive at his father-in-law's house on his horse and tie it up to the pole without asking permission from his in-laws. He should not look into the eyes of his affinal relatives and should speak softly. In this way he shows his modesty. As such, Kyrgyz men should be quiet and modest. These qualities of a groom towards affinal relatives remain forever, even long into married life. The groom should not use the terms 'father-in-law' (*kaiyn ata*) or 'mother-in-law' (*kaiyn ene*), but rather 'father' and 'mother', underscoring their closeness and importance as if they were his biological parents. He should treat his bride's siblings and relatives as if they were his own. If the groom shows respect his affinal side may express sympathy towards him by saying 'even the Prophet respected his son-in-law'. There is a ritual called *bayandos saluu*, which is to lay down a beautiful carpet, in order to welcome the groom. Usually this way of welcoming is reserved for respected elderly people and those who have visited Mecca. Through this ritual, the girl's parents display respect towards their son-in-law. Parents wish that their daughters become happily married. Therefore, they look for

ways to establish good and respectful relations with their son-in-law. In cases where the bride visits her natal family and for some reason the son-in-law cannot join, her parents send him some food. Kyrgyz women are respected, cared for, and given rights to move freely. An interesting proverb highlights that when a son-in-law gets old, he can become a *jeen*, which means a sister's son or a kin-related person (*Küyöö karysa jeen bolot*).

According to local ethnographer Ybyrai Abdyrakhmanov, the ritual of putting newlyweds to bed is practiced among Kyrgyz. The wives of the brothers [*jengeler*] prepare a bed for the young couple before their wedding night. They spend their first night together in the groom's home.⁴ Today, this ritual is practiced only at the groom's house, but in the old days this was also done among the members of the *Ichkilik*⁵, and was practiced in the house of the girl's father.

There is a proverb '*chykkan kyz chiyden tyshkary*' (lit. married daughter is behind the fence); which treats the daughter as an outsider after marriage. This proverb relates to Kyrgyz funeral practices, as a deceased person's body is transported to the cemetery from the yurt before the burial. The funeral is usually accompanied by funeral lamentations, *koshok*. Inside the yurt, the body is fenced with the grid of a mat made of *chiy* (high hard steppe grass, the stems of which go to the manufacturing of the mats). Comparing the girl with a deceased person is not a negative idea, but rather this indicates that once a girl is married, she should never go back to her natal family and instead establish a healthy family as wife to her husband. Therefore, during the bride's farewell the parents perform lamentations, or ritualized expressions of grief, *koshoks*. The idea behind *koshok* is to give advice and suggestions to the bride.



*Sisters-in-law braiding a girl's hair into two braids.*⁶

⁴ *Kyrgyz adabiyatynyn taryhy: Fol'kloristika. Oozeki chygarmachylyktyn janrlary*. Vol. 1. Ed. by A. Akmatallyev, 2nd Edition, Bishkek: Sham, 2004, pp. 125-126.

⁵ Kyrgyz divide themselves according to three big descent groups *Sol kanat*, *Ong kanat*, and *Ichkilik*.

⁶ Source: <http://www.turmush.kg/>

Another ritual is *öpkö chabuu* (when a goat is sacrificed). Here, a goat is usually slaughtered as a sacrifice to God, because it is believed that a goat's loud voice can reach the ears of God quickly. After slaughtering the goat, the lungs of the freshly slaughtered animal are cut out to hit on the back of the bride and the groom to drive away evil eyes and thrown to dogs (as it is believed that the disease and unhappiness contained in the lungs passes on to the dogs). This is a long-established ritual that nomads used to practice in order to avoid disease and unhappiness. The status of the lung among other pieces of meat is also considered very low and associated with less respect, while a much-respected piece of meat is the head and tail fat. Note that the statuses of different pieces of meat depend on the region.

The bride's parents, relatives, and friends erect a white yurt from which the bride has to be collected by the groom's relatives, friends, and other relatives before taking her away to the groom's house. The bride usually goes to the groom's house together with her *jengeler* (the wives of her brothers). However, on the way, there are two barriers that they have to pass by all means. First, the bride's young married and unmarried female and male relatives and friends organize a ritual called *arkan tosuu*, in which a rope is placed across the road, which is not removed unless a payment for entrance is paid for the bride. Such acts are accompanied with playful disputes, songs and jokes. The second barrier is located in the groom's village. The same procedure, *arkan tosuu*, is organized by blocking the road with rope, until a payment for entrance is made. Usually the groom's best man pays for the entrance, giving money, sweets, and other gifts to those who blocked the road.



Feasting of guests. (Photo by the author).



A new bride sitting behind a köshögö, bridal curtain, in her husband's house.⁷

Finally, the bride reaches the groom's house. This day can be considered a festive day not only by the groom's family but also by the entire community. If wealthy families invite many people, including those in the neighboring villages, the poor ones host mainly the senior relatives, respected elders of the village. The elders of the community give their blessings to the newlyweds by saying: '*köshögöng kögörsün*', let your curtain⁸ prosper! (this is to wish a bride a happy marriage); '*aldyngdy bala, artyngdymal bassyn*' let there be many children before you, and behind you (numerous) cattle!; '*uchungar uzaryp, tukumungar köböysün*' or '*bala-chakaluu bolgula*' let there be many children!

The bride is welcomed by her mother-in-law, who gives the bride butter to taste, placing a white scarf over the bride's head as a symbol of her blessing, and showering the bride with sweets. The newlyweds bow to the groom's parents, senior relatives and other guests. For the first three days in the groom's house, the bride is usually hidden behind a curtain and visitors come to see the bride and to present different kinds of scarves. The curtain is prepared by the mother-in-law in some regions, while in others it is prepared by the girl's mother. In the past, the curtain was prepared from sown-together pieces of fabric or *kurak*, but nowadays it is made of expensive

⁷ Source: <https://kaktus.media/>

⁸ This is referred to *köshögö*, a bride curtain behind which the bride sits for several days at her in-law's house.

fabrics without using the *kurak* design. Of course, a handmade curtain with *kurak* design is valued more due to the symbolic meanings attached to it. The bride does not throw it away but rather keeps it for a long time and uses it for making other things, such as bed sheet, dresses, and *kurak*. People believe that if the curtain becomes dirty, burnt, or torn, this will bring negative consequences to the newlyweds. So, the idea behind the curtain is not only to separate the newlyweds' bed from the rest, but also to protect the family. Behind the curtain is the bride's dowry. The dowry depicts to the visitors her mother's dowry preparations, the handicraft skill of the bride, and her father's wealth.

The *mullah* is called to register the marriage in accordance with Muslim rules and to establish a contract between the bride and groom in the presence of two witnesses. After the *nikah* or marriage agreement, the newlyweds can consider themselves husband and wife.⁹ Kyrgyz marriages are accompanied with water and salt, since the former is considered clean and the latter a protector. Not only do the newlyweds taste the water but the two witnesses also drink it. It is important that the *mullah* gets consent to the marriage from both sides. If a girl is shy and cannot respond to the *mullah's* question, he will ask her to respond without engaging anyone, such as her friends or *jenge* (older brother's wife), to respond on her behalf. It is important that the bride gives consent herself about her intentions in order to complete the marriage ceremony. Participants of the *nikah* ceremony are required to sit properly, without crossing hands or feet, due to folklore. Some women check to ensure that no shoes have been left outside the door and that no ropes are tied in the building where the *nikah* is performed. The idea behind this is for the married couple to have a happy and healthy future together.

Another important aspect is the appointment of the representative parents (*ökül ata, ökül ene*) for young couples. These representatives are typically witnesses during the ritual ceremony. They are elected by the groom's parents in order to better integrate the newlywed bride into her husband's lineage and to introduce her to the internal life of the community. The representative parents should be the most respected people in the community or those who have enjoyed good relations with the groom's parents. The age of the representative parents is either the same as the groom's parents or younger, while it is not possible to appoint older representative parents. If the representative parents pass away, it is not possible to appoint new ones. If the newlyweds quarrel, the role of the representative parents is to intervene and to help them to discover the reasons behind the conflict, so that it can be resolved. They support the couple not only morally by giving advice but are also responsible for providing financial support. For example, they may gift them cattle, sheep, and horses. More recently, parents have become very selective, choosing as representatives the wealthiest people they know, who might provide more financial support to the couple.

⁹ In the old days, even before the expansion of Islam, Kyrgyz used to cut each other's hands, taste the blood and promise to be together forever.

Even today there is a ritual that the bride's female relatives make the newlyweds' bed. These so-called bed makers must have children and be happily married women. In contrast, infertile women are not given the task to prepare the newlyweds' bed. Some bring babies to the bed of the newlyweds so that they will have many children¹⁰.

After *nikah* and the first wedding night, the young bride is considered a new family member in the household. This is not limited to her new household; but rather she is considered a new member of the entire community, where she is to perform her services during life cycle events together with other young brides. Family members bless brides who get up early, prepare breakfast, clean the house, and open the yurt's roof. When the roof is open, light enters the yurt. This symbolizes someone entering a new life, a whole new set of everyday concerns, existence, and means of subsistence. In



Bed prepared for the newlyweds. (Photo by the author).

the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, women practice cleaning the yard early in the morning and believe that by doing this they will get blessings from the earth for having beautiful faces. This, however, is not practiced in other parts of Kyrgyzstan, which may be related to the fact that these practices have been adopted by those Kyrgyz living side by side with ethnic Uzbeks.

Another important aspect regarding the bride's behavior is related to hiding her face from senior male relatives and avoiding calling them by their names (*tergöö*). A book by Kasym Tynystanov, published in 1924, provides a short story related to the name avoidance ritual. "The bride has six brothers-in-law; their names are the following:

¹⁰ According to oral sources, the village Toguz-Bulak of Leylek district, there was a rich man, whose name was Kojomamat, 56 years old in the 19th century. He used to have two wives, children, and grandchildren, once he suddenly saw 13 years old girl, who was taking some water to home. He decided to get married and gave her father one bag of gold as bride-price, who agreed to give his daughter to the old man. After the wedding ceremony, the bed was made so well for the newlywed by using all the blankets brought by the young bride. It was so high that the head of the man was sticking out from the yurt's top hole during his first night. This young bride gave birth to 9 children and died in 1970 when turned 100 years old.

- 1) Suban (water);
- 2) Kamyshbai (reed-rich);
- 3) Karyshkyr (wolf);
- 4) Koiluubai (rich sheep holder);
- 5) Bychakbai (knife-rich);
- 6) Bulööbai (rich knife sharpener).

Once when the bride was grazing sheep, one of her sheep got caught by a wolf in between water flow and reeds. She was afraid and decided to call for help. She wanted to say that a wolf was eating one of her sheep in between water flow and reeds, and whether someone would give her some knives, but she could not call for help because her brothers-in-law had names associated with sheep, water, reeds, wolf, knife, etc. Instead, she described the whole situation using other terms, and, of course her message sounded more humorous than threatening.”¹¹

Before marriage, a girl is brought up by her own biological mother, but after marriage she is passed to the hands of her mother-in-law. The Kyrgyz have the proverb: *'koichunun taiagynan, kelindin aiagynan'*, meaning that the welfare of sheep depends on the shepherd; while the family's well-being depends on the young woman. Upon the arrival of a young bride, if the groom's family becomes prosperous; this implies that the young bride is considered a bringer of happiness and good luck. Thus, family members will treat her with respect and honor.

Another significant ritual is the custom dedicated to fire *'otko kirgizüü'*. Each family member, usually the groom's elder brothers invite by turn the newlyweds to their homes with the aim of introducing the daughter-in-law to her husband's relatives. They slaughter a sheep in their honor and put on her head a white scarf – *'ak jooluk'*. As mentioned earlier, the color white for the Kyrgyz symbolizes purity, a happy journey, happiness and pure thoughts. In turn, the receiving side also brings some gifts, such as blankets, carpets and other things. The idea behind this ritual is to welcome the bride to the groom's family. In the old days, the Kyrgyz used to bring the girl through fire, by making a circle round a fire in the courtyard before entering the house. This was considered as an act which cleansed her and incorporated her as a new family member.

Being a new family member is not always easy for a bride. For instance, some mothers-in-law follow the idea of *'balany jashynan, kelindi bashynan'* meaning that a child must be brought up properly from childhood and that a bride has to be brought up from the moment she arrives at her new home. This implies that some mothers-in-law are very strict with their children and daughters-in-law. However, not all mothers-in-law are this way; some are soft and allow some freedom for their daughters-in-law by sharing their life experiences, preparing food, and teaching household tasks. There is no a single rule for the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

¹¹ *Kasym Tynystan uulu: Adabiy chygarmalar*. Bishkek: Adabiyat, 1991, p. 94.

During the Soviet times, bowing, name avoidance, and hiding faces was considered backward and a violation of the rights of the women, but apparently behind all these rules and norms have being hidden moral-ethical education and pedagogical knowledge.

There are a few superstitions that exist regarding the relationship between the husband and wife and their parents. If the newlyweds are playing with cold water, their parents might stop this game saying that their relationship would turn as cold as the water. The bride is not supposed to go cross their parents-in-law's bed; otherwise this could bring bad luck and unhappiness in her marriage. Brides are not supposed to go on the house's roof, because this suggests that they are above their parents-in-law. If infertile women steps on a young bride's shoes, this implies that the young bride will not have children in the future. The idea behind all these superstitions is to bring the bride up according to society's rules and norms and to encourage her to be clean, tidy, and neat.

In the past, cases of divorce among the Kyrgyz were rare. Upon the bride's arrival, her brothers' wives (*jengeler*) and other female relatives tell the girl to remain in this home forever. Before they leave the bride's new home, the wives of her brothers put a large stone and a heavy ax on the hem of the girl's dress, saying that the stone is heavy and it should stay in the place of its fall. They spread wheat, corn and maize around where the bride is seated. The bride is not able to see off her female relatives by going outside her new home.

The new bride sits behind a curtain for three days, after which she can begin household duties and stop hiding from in-laws. The bride's *abysyns*, i. e. the wives of her husband's brothers put a *supura* (mat for rolling dough and storing flour, made of sheepskin or goatskin) under her arm, while asking her to bow three times. The groom's female relatives spill some white flour onto the rug to symbolically wish that the bride be good, positive, and as light as the white flour¹². After that they ask the bride to spin a thread of yarn. Through this ritual, they wish that the bride is able to act swiftly, quickly, and be hard working, and executive. This idea is to hope for a successful, hardworking and creative bride.

In southern Kyrgyzstan, especially in Batken district, after three days, the bride's mother, sisters-in-law, and other senior female relatives visit her. This ritual is called '*köshögö jyidy*', meaning to take away the curtain. The groom's side welcomes the bride's family with respect and honor. The bride's female relatives remove the curtain; meanwhile the groom's female relatives enter the house. Both sides try to kiss one another. Should the bride's female relatives be the first to kiss the other side, this indicates that the bride would be dominant; whereas if the groom's female relatives are the first to kiss the bride's side this means that the groom would be the dominant one.

First, the mother-in-law introduces the young bride to her new house, inside and outside and shows her the yard and kitchen. The mother-in-law is treated gracefully by the family. The bride can learn a lot from her mother-in-law and gets advice and support. The mother-in-law teaches her how to show respect and to avoid using the names of senior or junior relatives.

¹² Among both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks there is a symbolical meaning to the color white in terms of it being good, positive, and light. Therefore, all white products such as milk and flour, are important.

Here it is important to highlight the importance of daughters among the Kyrgyz after they are married. When girls visit their parents, they are given many gifts and a lot of food, and the girl can do whatever she wants. This kind of freedom at home can be extended to her children, who are referred to as *jeen*. A mark of respect is to treat *jeen* well, letting them take any item or things they like. They are very much spoiled, and can be described as being worse than wolves, saying it is better if seven wolves come than *jeen*. The matrilineal grandparents should always give cattle for the *jeen*'s honor, either sheep or a horse. There is even an extra plate put aside for *jeen* when meat is distributed. In return, the receiving side has responsibilities towards their matrilineal relatives, to respect and honor them and to greet them without waiting for any special invitation.

Among Uzbeks

Uzbek weddings are often large and consist of numerous rituals. The weddings are a great event not only for the young couple, but also for their families, relatives, and community members. Traditional Uzbek weddings consist of a certain sequence of events. They start from searching for a suitable bride and end with the eventual wedding rituals. As mentioned above, the selection process can take several months, sometimes even years. Despite this long process, Uzbek wedding ceremonies are bright, interesting and joyful events where many families, relatives, and community members get together and enjoy each other's company and establish new family ties, relatives, and thus community members. Thus, this is also about establishing an extended network of close people.



*Welcoming the bride and groom to the wedding celebration in a restaurant.*¹³

¹³ Source: <https://www.google.com/>

The wedding day is known among Uzbeks not only within but also outside the *mahalla* due largely to the loud music that is played during the event. Musical instruments like *doira*, *rubab*, and *dutor* are played in order to inform as well as to invite guests to the wedding ceremony. The day of marrying off a son or a daughter is a grand event for the whole *mahalla*. It is a social obligation for community members to come and to offer well wishes, help, and contributions to the feast. Usually, distant relatives, neighbors, friends, and co-workers all do this. In return, the receiving side should offer tea and *osh* (rice pilaf).

Uzbek weddings usually last for three or four days, and each day has its own events and programs. The rite of the morning rice pilaf is agreed on by all relatives, neighbors and acquaintances, who help in the organization of the feast. Several days earlier, the relatives arrive and begin the preparations for the feast, starting from cleaning the carrots to baking bread. An interesting aspect to highlight is that each person assisting brings along their own knives, wishing that they would also need to organize such a big feast again in the future.

One can observe this practice especially with regard *kyz uzatuu*, the girl's farewell. *Kyz uzatuu* is an Uzbek tradition – a very moving and exciting event for the girl and her parents, relatives, and community members. This feast is arranged by the bride's parents who invite all of their relatives. There are also guests from the groom's side present. The purpose of *kyz uzatuu* is to introduce the groom to his future relatives and for the girl to say goodbye to the natal relatives.

This day begins with the preparation of the Uzbek dish rice pilaf, which is mainly cooked by men. The bride's parents invite all their relatives and friends and treat them to rice pilaf and sweets during the wedding day. The groom, traditionally dressed in a festive suit, with which the bride's parents present to him, goes to his future wife in the afternoon. The girl is dressed in a national wedding dress, and her face is always covered with a veil so that she would not be jinxed. The girl is accompanied by her girlfriends and best friend. They gather in relatives' or a neighbor's home and sing and dance, while waiting for the bridegroom to come and offer gifts to 'redeem' her. One of the groom's best men enters the bride's house and gives money in cash in order to buy information on the location of the bride. When the groom enters the house he is welcomed first by a white path lying across the porch. This is usually a very clean and expensive mat and is taken away by the best man due to the symbolic meaning attached to it. The groom also avoids sitting in the bride's house unless given money or a gift. Meanwhile, the bride is brought to her house together with her female friends and relatives who sing the song '*yor-yor*'. The bride's parents prepare a special room for the young people and they all enter the room to eat before heading off. Meanwhile, juniper leaves are burnt, accompanied by well wishes for the young couple and their loving relationship. Here it is important to highlight some folklore relating to the bride's farewell. A plate or salver is hidden among the beddings or blankets with the idea that the bride would be respected. Additional sweets are also hidden in the bedding of the bride, with the hope that the relationship between the new husband and wife would be sweet.



*The nikah ceremony.*¹⁴

Young people, before officially registering at the registry office, are married according to Islamic law, by going to the mosque and getting blessed by the mullah. Depending on the region, some bring their brides to her father's house; while others go directly to the groom's parents' house after the civic and Islamic ceremony, where her relatives are expecting her, first by laying a white path to the porch. The marriage ceremony is performed as follows: in the presence of witnesses (at least two), the imam (or any knowledgeable Muslim) asks the bride and groom for their consent to marry. During this ritual, the imam recites prayers, after which the young couple make promises to be close friends and faithful to one another. There are also a few superstitions related to how the newlyweds should behave during the *nikoh* ritual. The newlyweds should not clench their fists or organize the *nikoh* on Fridays; otherwise they will become unhappy. Moreover, the bride should remove all of her golden jewelry during the ceremony. During the wedding ritual *nikoh*, the couple should not see each other and should sit separately. The bride uncovers her face only after the ritual is over and when they finish drinking water. The witnesses include the bride's female relatives and friends. If the bride accidentally touches, kicks or pushes one of the female witnesses, this implied that this girl would get married next. If any of the witnesses try on her scarf or *paranja*, this also implies that the person will get married very soon.

When a girl is taken away from her natal home, usually her father's younger brother will carry her and put her into the car. Also, as the car takes off from the girl's house, the girl's relatives throw stones towards the car wishing her to remain seated in the place of the future husband as a stone. As mentioned above, among the Kyrgyz this ritual is practiced by the bride's female relatives.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/>



Bride greeting the groom, and the tradition of revealing the bride's face. (Photo by the author).

Close relatives of the young couple wait for the newlyweds to arrive home. The initial ritual involved the groom's relatives bringing the bride through fire, making a circle around a fire in the courtyard before entering the house. After that the bride signified the idea of luminary or light. The idea behind this fire ritual was to clean the bride from any bad illnesses. For example, in the region of Aravan in southern Kyrgyzstan, Uzbek grooms carry their brides into their house. With this practice, he treats his future wife like a small child in order to pacify her. The bride's brother who accompanies his sister prevents her from getting out of the car. For this, he receives some payment, after which he will accept the fact that his sister will enter the house of her future husband. This payment is called

bychak pulu. Other female relatives of the bride who also accompany her to the family of her future husband organize a greeting ritual. A young wife, when crossing the threshold of a new house, bows to her husband, and her husband's relatives, neighbors and friends, and in return they shower her with sweets, wishing for a happy family life. Some families organize a welcoming ceremony for the bride by putting a spoon in milk to signify the bride in a positive light. Milk is associated with notions of being pure, clean and light. After arriving at her new home, by tradition, the family life of the newlyweds begin.

There are several rituals related to the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In order to keep the relationship sweet, the mother-in-law greets her future daughter-in-law with sugar. Sometimes, the daughter-in-law is given honey to taste in order to make her tongue sweet or sweet tea with sugar. Another ritual is to put a piece of cotton under the daughter-in-law's arm in order to wish her to be light and soft like cotton. The mother-in-law offers her comfortable bedding with the idea that her daughter-in-law would treat her in return with respect and honor. Hoping that the daughter-in-law would prepare a lot of food and bread and that the newlyweds' life would be rich and sweet, the father-in-law offers flour, butter,

and sweets. In the past, it was tradition that the bride was supposed to hide her face in front of her parents-in-law and father-in-law's brothers. According to Uzbek tradition, the wedding party's expenses were borne by the groom's side and that the party was held at the groom's house. But modern Uzbeks often share the costs and celebrate the wedding at a restaurant. During the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom give each other rings. Even though this ritual comes from European and Russian culture, it is nevertheless well accepted and has gained traditional meaning. In Uzbek language, the ring is translated as *üzük*, meaning torn, so that the newlyweds would not be torn off from one another. The newlyweds appoint representative parents and bring forty *sebet* or gifts during the feast. As amongst the Kyrgyz, the representative parents are very close to Uzbek newlyweds. The expenses are considerable, because of the size and nature of Uzbek weddings. The wedding ceremony's main purpose so far has been the transition of a woman to a man's house, but many more customs must also be observed.

Usually Uzbeks do not slaughter cattle during the feast; but rather they prefer to slaughter one sheep for the whole feast. Rice pilaf is ready by the time the morning prayers end, after which the male relatives traditionally sit at tables. In the past, men would serve tea. The Uzbek wedding rice pilaf takes about two hours and is cooked only by men. But the table is not limited to rice pilaf, because Uzbek cuisine is rich and varied. Thus, the table may consist of fruits, vegetables, sweets, *samosa*, flat breads and baked dishes.

The sacredness of food is interconnected to folklore and rituals. For example, the brisket of the sheep is given to the groom, while the groom's best man and friends are not given any walnuts due to the belief that despite their hard shells it is possible to break them into pieces. Thus, the Uzbeks hope that the lives of their young friends should not be broken like walnuts shells. The sound of breaking nut shells is loud; therefore, loud sounds are avoided so that the newlyweds would live in peace and friendship. Another food at the weddings is called *mastava*, which is a thick rice soup with vegetables, peas, and is cooked with lamb. The idea behind *mastava* is to offer hope that the young couple would be happily married.

The following day, after the wedding, is called the 'ceremony of the uncovering of the bride's face' (*jüzachty*). This is usually done by a small boy with a tree branch, and the idea behind this ritual is to wish that the young bride gives birth to a boy, while the tree branches indicate having a lot of children. The bride's female relatives are treated to a lot of food and sweets. The girl's mother would go to her son-in-law's house where she has to actively take part in the ritual of the 'run-away groom'. The groom goes to the houses of relatives and neighbors together with his friends and waits for a message from his mother-in-law. Here, the bride's side sends one sheep's thigh. After eating this sheep's thigh, the groom is accompanied by relatives and they go to his house. Prior to this event, the groom knows in advance what the bride would like, such as chocolate, flowers or perfume. He will thus bring these gifts to her.



*A köshögö, bridal curtain.*¹⁵

Normally the bride is not brought to an empty or completely new house because it is believed that a new house does not possess any good qualities or holiness with regard to the birth of children or to the development of their marriage. Therefore, a house with a long family history is considered a more acceptable place to welcome a bride upon her first arrival. In some cases, if twins get married at the same time, one bride is brought to the house via the door and the other via the windows in order to avoid divorces among the couples. When the brides enter the house, they wait until their mother-in-law allows them to do so by saying that the house belongs to them.

Before the arrival of the bride, the groom's family prepares a curtain for the couple (*chimildik*). The bed is usually made behind the curtain, while it should not be made by widows or divorced women. In addition, the mother-in-law should not see the bed of the couple, otherwise, there is a belief that she might become jealous of her daughter-in-law. For the parents, their children always remain young, no matter how old they really are. Therefore, a mother's jealousy is a natural phenomenon. Before he sleeps with his wife, the mother kisses the face of her son or calls his name, reminding him of her existence and that he should not forget her and that he should listen to his mother only. Should the mother not do this before going bed, the son may not listen to his mother in the future. The son also should do his best not to follow what his wife says. Behind the curtain, if one of the newlyweds steps on the other's foot, this indicates that he or she would be the dominant one or leader in the family.

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.instagram.com/>

The moment the groom gets out of the car he will try and step on the bride's foot, because whoever steps on the foot of the other spouse first will be the head of the family. Another superstition is related to water. One should not bring any water behind the curtain; otherwise this could lead to the newlyweds having a cold relationship. Another belief has to do with a broom. So that the happiness of the newlyweds would not be brushed aside, the brushed dirt and trash should be collected into one place and removed after 40 days. Usually, in both Kyrgyz and Uzbek cultures, garbage is removed immediately fearing that it will attract bad spirits to the house. They also do not mix brushed dirt and ash together when sweeping the house and fireplace as this might cause the occurrence of bad and happy events, such as feast and death on the same day.

Many restrictions are related to the sacred first forty days of the newlyweds because these days are considered important but also insecure and risky. In the first forty days the couple is not allowed to go outside at night. And after dark the husband is obliged to be near his beloved wife. Only on the second night after the ceremony, can the bride remain alone with the groom and by tradition the new husband should never leave his bride for the first forty days. The couple should also avoid leaving their shoes outside the house during this time. If the bride's shoes are stepped on by someone with the wishes that she will give birth to a boy or a girl, this implies that this wish would come true. In order to make the life of the bride very sweet, some people put sweets in her shoes. Lights should not be turned off for the first forty days with the aim of making the life of the newlyweds light and happy. A sick person is not allowed to go behind the curtain, by believing that illness spoils healthy relationships. If someone has died as the new bride is moving into the house, this is regarded as a bad sign and it can be interpreted that the bride was not accepted by one of the relatives, and therefore someone died. The bride is not allowed to wear someone else's shoes because this may have negative repercussions, in that she might follow the path of another person instead of her own.

The newlyweds are provided with various kinds of food for the first forty days by the bride's parents, female relatives, and neighbors. In order to make the life of the newlywed sweet, people bring a lot of sweets. The first day they are given dumplings by the bride's parents, symbolizing many children. The dumplings are usually numerous and small; therefore, these pieces imply having a lot of children. The parents prepare lung for the groom to remind him that he should not be arrogant. In the past, the food for the first forty days was provided for but nowadays this is not always the case. The main reason for this is that it is believed that a young couple should spend time together and should not worry about making food for themselves as well as for their parents. The Uzbeks explain this tradition with the saying 'even the Prophet respected his son-in-law'. A lot of elegant and bright costumes in the national style are sewn for the bride, which she should change daily for the first forty days after the wedding.

In general, both Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups share many common patterns with regard wedding ceremonies, rituals and related folklore. The idea behind these is

largely to strengthen relationships and affinal ties. Most importantly, of course, their main focus is on the happiness of young newlyweds and their future marital union. This is made possible due to the combination of existing folklore (mainly fetishistic, animistic features), rituals, and traditions and their adaptation to new realities. At the same time these practices do not exist separately from one another; one can see the influence of different cultures, modes of life and constant changes. It is important to record these phenomena and write them down in order to see the extent of changes of current practices in the future. Through examining these practices, one can delve deep into the culture of particular ethnic groups and understand their mentality and worldview.



CHAPTER 2

RITUALS AND FOLKLORE RELATED TO THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Folklore before the Birth of a Child

Among Kyrgyz

In the past, the lifestyle of nomadic Kyrgyz was extremely harsh. The birth of a child, their upbringing, and well-being were associated with many superstitions, prejudices and rituals. Much of this folklore has survived to this day, with Kyrgyz practicing many such traditions in their everyday lives. Kyrgyz families usually consist of large extended household members, while the head of the family (usually the father) is responsible for the longevity of his family as well as its lineage. But in general, the birth of a child among Kyrgyz people is an important and celebratory event, while having many children is valued highly.

A few proverbs highlight the importance and value of having children: '*Balaluu üi-bazar, balasyz üi-mazar*'- the literal translation is that 'a house with many children is like a bazaar buzzing; a house without children is like a silent grave'. Another proverb is '*balaluu üi-padyshaluu üi*', meaning that a house with children is characteristic of a king (the behavior of the king, royal habits, etc.); and '*ashka toigon bar, bashka toigon jok*', which means one could be full from eating food, but one could not be full from having children.

A typical hope in a Kyrgyz household is, first and foremost, to have children. In the book *Kutadgu Bilig*, the outstanding 11th century Turkic poet and thinker, Yusuf Balasaguni, wrote that 'it is important to raise children; no one likes childless people'.¹⁶ With this statement, he also highlights the aims and wishes of human beings to have children. In the past, as today, children were viewed as having socioeconomic importance, which was mainly related to population growth, the expansion of lineage members, and thus the acquisition of lands, pastures, and cattle for local communities. Having children in Western societies does not equate to wealth and has often quite the opposite effect. Survival depends on education in consumerist and Western societies; whereas survival depends on how much help you could get from your children in Eastern societies.

¹⁶ Balasaguni Jusup. *Kut alchu bilim: Dastan*. Translated by Tölögön Kozubekov from Old Turkic. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1988, p. 286.

There are rich folklore, traditional ceremonies, and rituals that celebrate the birth, delivery, and upbringing of a child. These ancient traditions and beliefs have influenced current traditions and views around child delivery and rearing. However, some of these beliefs have been transformed by incorporating the beliefs of neighboring ethnic groups. Some beliefs lost their previous meaning, changed or adapted new patterns. One may also notice many of the rituals have shamanistic and Islamic overtones that nicely work together and give meaning to people.

Among Kyrgyz people, childcare starts even before the child's delivery. It is important to highlight the genealogical relatedness of Kyrgyz people and the fear of mixing potential relatives. Therefore, by keeping track of one's genealogies or knowing by heart seven generations of their patrilineal ancestors, the Kyrgyz try to prevent the marital union of closely genealogically-related people. Instead, the most preferred marriage is if the young couple is genealogically-distant or come far from one another. This is their cultural interpretation of nature. In this sense, local terms are widely used and imply the meaning 'blood biased', 'lung biased' and 'impurity'.

This genetically oriented practice contains several economic, political and social factors. The establishment of affinal ties from far away is beneficial, in case of drought, hunger, and earthquakes, as different lineage groups can support one another. Therefore, marriage is not solely a union of two individuals, but also the union of two respected communities and lineage groups. If we look at the Kyrgyz epic *Manas*, one can see how the father of Manas arranged the marriage of his son by considering the union with Kanykei as important not only for his son but also for the lineage group. He looked at the potential bride, her compatibility with Manas, and her lineage:

If I say my son would get married,
But I might face a lot of trouble,
It looks like there will not be any descendants from this marriage,
There might not be any children in the family
It looks like the bride is infertile
As she has narrow shoulders
Even if she gives birth to children
They might die.¹⁷

After marriage, the couple will start living together under the same yurt and will learn a lot from one another. However, many of the rituals start only once the bride gets pregnant with her first child. Culturally, it is expected that the husband and wife take care of each other by spending more time together when the wife is pregnant. Before being pregnant, they would spend most of their time separately by doing their own household tasks, meeting only in the evening. Once the bride gets pregnant the relationship should have a different romantic overtone, with both being more careful and attentive to one another. This is considered as an obligation from both sides. For example, the husband will not allow his wife to carry heavy things, will not leave her

¹⁷ *Manas*. Vol. 2, Version by Sagynbai Orozbek uulu. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1980, p. 355.

alone, or quarrel with her. By abiding by these expectations, there is a belief or hope that the wife would give birth to a smart, brave, and skillful khan; thus, arguing with a pregnant woman equates to abuse and scolding. Pregnant women are considered sacred with special powerful qualities. In order to avoid any transmission of curses to the child, the husband will try to avoid behaving badly in any way and to become a responsible and reliable person. Not only the husband, but all family members will try to follow the right path and avoid committing any forbidden practices. Kyrgyz people believe in external forces which may harm pregnant women, therefore they avoid the term “pregnancy” and instead use different terms like ‘*kosh boiluu*’ (a two-bodied woman), ‘*eki kat*’ (two-layered woman), or ‘*jüktüü*’ (a load carrying woman). In other words, the condition of being pregnant, pregnancy, and baby-related stories are considered holy or even taboo.

Pregnant women sometimes have different tastes, whims or desires for different kinds of food. It is thus the husband’s responsibility to provide the desired food for the pregnant woman in order to satisfy her needs. The Kyrgyz believe that if a pregnant woman does not get what she craves, it might have a negative influence on the unborn infant’s health and well-being. Therefore, in order to prevent this from happening, family members and husbands will do their best to find the desired food. This tradition is well-illustrated in Kyrgyz folk tales. For example, Chyiyrdy, the mother of the epic hero Manas, desired a tiger’s heart and then gave birth to the hero Manas. She prepared the tiger’s heart as noted below.

She cooked it roughly,
Devoured it selfishly.
She said: “Even the broth tastes good, I will drink it too.”
And she guzzled
Two bowls of broth.
Then she loosened up,
And her craving was satisfied.¹⁸

While thinking about the well-being and health of the baby, Kyrgyz people try to help the pregnant woman. If someone brings the desired food to the pregnant woman, this is considered as kind, soul-saving business, a good deed, and an act of charity. This person would then receive gratitude from the pregnant woman for their good deed. As such, anyone can bring food to pregnant women.

As mentioned above, it is expected that the desired food should be brought by the husband, but if the wife finds and eats the desired food before the husband brings it, this implies that the husband would feel the contractions and labor. Some would find the food to give to the husband, so that the husband could bring it to his wife. For example, the issue of the desired food of pregnant women is described in Chingiz Aitmatov’s novel, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*¹⁹. The main protagonist,

¹⁸ *Manas*. Vol. 1, Version by Sagynbai Orozbek uulu. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1978, p. 53.

¹⁹ *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* published in Russian in the *Novy Mir* literary magazine in 1980.

Yedigei's wife Ükübala desperately wants to eat fish despite the difficulty in sourcing any. Despite this, the husband still finds a way to retrieve fish for his wife. Sometimes pregnant women might want to eat everything and sometimes they do not want to eat anything at all. This kind of experience among women is called in the Kyrgyz language '*it talgak*', dog's craving. In such situations, Kyrgyz people usually offer heavy food to pregnant women.

Many pregnant women believe that the well-being of their child is influenced by certain beliefs, traditions, and superstitions, which mostly consist of a number of restrictions. Pregnant women should not sit on top of a sack and not jump over a stick. A broom that was used by a pregnant woman should not be left standing upright; otherwise it is believed that the unborn infant's head would be turned in the opposite direction and that they would be delivered by breech (feet-first). Many women fear that a breech birth could cause many challenges in the birth process; therefore, most try to follow these rules strictly.

Some rules exist on how pregnant women should sit down. For example, pregnant women should not sit with their legs crossed but instead should sit with their legs under them. Another thing is that pregnant women should not sit on a horse saddle. Moreover, the bed should be prepared in such a way that the blankets should be rolled up and directed towards Qiblah (the direction towards the Kaaba in Mecca²⁰). Otherwise, the Kyrgyz believe that the unborn infant might be delivered by breech. Interestingly enough, women who experience a difficult labor are considered as having special qualities, dignities, and sacredness.

Another threat related to birth is when the umbilical cord is wrapped around the baby's neck several times during the pregnancy. In order to prevent this from happening, pregnant women should try not to jump over any kinds of robes or brooms, or to take ash from a hearth. It is forbidden to cut the hair of a pregnant woman; otherwise it is believed that the life of the infant would be short or their intellect low. Pregnant women are not allowed to go to funerals partially as seeing the mourning and lamentation would negatively affect the infant and partially because the unborn infant would hear praying for a deceased person. The Kyrgyz try to separate birth and death as two completely different domains, and as such they should not be present at the same place.

Some rituals are linked to the making of the child's appearance beautiful. One such is that while kneading dough, the pregnant mother would stroke the dough's surface or cheek. There is also folklore related to fathers and their children. For example, if a man accidentally bites the round end of a cooked sheep's knee bone while his wife is pregnant, this means that his future child will end up being bald. While eating the knuckle bone of a sheep or a goat (*chükö*), a father will try to clean all the meat off the bone in order for his daughter to be beautiful. A father is not supposed to sniff

²⁰ Muslims need to know the direction of the *qiblah*, wherever they are, so that they can stand facing Mecca during the prayer

elaegnus²¹; otherwise he might not have children in the future. This is because the Kyrgyz believe that the strong smell of elaegnus will attract the father's love, affection, sympathy and favor away from his potential child.

A number of restrictions relate to how pregnant women should eat food. If a pregnant woman consumes camel meat, this implies that the woman will bear a child for 12 months like a camel. If both parents eat camel meat, this will not have any negative effect on either of them. However, if a pregnant woman eats camel meat; she will then need to take an extra piece of camel meat for her husband to eat. In general, camel meat is not regularly eaten among Kyrgyz, and may be done only once a year. In the past, the Kyrgyz believed that the camel used to be a human being. However, they would still consume camel meat, mainly during special events such as the worship of holy places and pilgrimage (i. e. to holy places, such as Mecca). As such, a camel was usually sacrificed for God's help and redemption or for the ritual of electing a khan.

Rabbit meat is not offered to pregnant women; otherwise, people believe, the infant's mouth will resemble that of a rabbit. As is the case with camel meat, if both husband and wife consume the rabbit meat together, this will have no harmful or negative effects on anyone. For some, fish, ibex meat, and horse meat are given to pregnant women. In particular, the ibex meat will have some significant effects. If a pregnant woman eats ibex meat, a hunter's path will be blocked and thus his upcoming hunting endeavors would not be successful. Therefore, in order to unblock his path, the hunter will ask the pregnant woman to prepare seven pieces of fried bread which he will eat these pieces of bread alone in the mountains. Only after this practice would the hunting path be unblocked.

In general, it is not common practice to buy clothes or to choose names for unborn children in advance, because before their deliveries, the infants are seen to be in the hands of God: only after their deliveries are the infants seen to be in the hands of people. The Kyrgyz, as mentioned already, think about their future children's well-being even before their births and follow certain rules in this regard. In this way they hope that they are protecting their unborn infants from negative effects and casting out evil spirits and the evil eye.

When a pregnant woman's labor begins, women in the neighborhood will cry out loud saying 'Cattle came!' This is a sign that the pregnant woman would give birth to a baby soon. Many believe that a child comes to this world only when the cattle go inside the yard. Moreover, linking labor with cattle is related to the fact that women usually spend a lot of their time with their cattle, by giving them food or milking them every day. Pregnant women are often busy doing household tasks and taking care of cattle. This is a cultural practice with medical effects, in that to be physically active is considered useful for pregnant women and can contribute to an easy child delivery.

²¹ Elaeagnus, also known as silver berry or oleaster, is a genus of about 50-70 species of flowering plants in the family Elaeagnaceae.

In the past, it was believed that some pregnant women would only deliver after ten to eleven months. In such cases, pregnant women were asked to go under a camel. As mentioned above, pregnant camels carry their infants for up to twelve months. Some would suggest that pregnant woman bring eggs to a mill and leave them there without looking back. Many also believed that hugging a mosque with outspread arms would facilitate the delivery process. The first two practices are folklore, which some still believe and practice; whereas the last suggestion was influenced by Islamic practices.

When a pregnant woman's labor starts, *anachy*, midwives (i. e. women with several children, experienced women, and healers) are invited to assist in the delivery process. This task is incredibly important because the life of the woman depends on them. They perform various kinds of rituals in order to make the delivery process as easy as possible and for the child to be in the best pre-natal position possible. When the labor starts, the pregnant woman's mother-in-law may lightly hit on top of her head with a *jengche*, a glove for baking bread in a clay oven, and say a few words '*el köchüp jatat, sen da erte köch*', meaning literally that 'people are moving, i. e., to another pasture, you should also move'. The other meaning behind this is for the pregnant wife to deliver the child smoothly and with ease without any complications and challenges.

Afterwards, the midwives place the pregnant woman on a blanket and shake her, saying '*ong, ong, ong bol*', meaning 'be in the right position.' In the body of the expecting mother, numerous changes take place that allow the child to be born. The most significant change occurs in the uterus – the organ in which new life develops. Pregnancy is characterized by an increase in the size of the uterus, a change in its consistency (density) and shape. The idea behind this ritual, which is performed close to the woman's due date, is to take any measures necessary to correct the child's position and let the its head come out first.

Many signs and superstitions related to quick and easy births have been transmitted from generation to generation and surround most women during their pregnancy. During labor, it is important to untie any knots in the house, because labor is associated with knots; therefore, the need for untying is crucial in order to facilitate the delivery process. The girl's relatives or mother-in-law burn juniper and spread flour over the pregnant woman's bed, which should remain unchanged for a long time. In addition, the Kyrgyz practice adding some pieces of snake skin to food or tea in order to make the birth process smooth and easy. If a neighbor comes to the house and asks for something while a woman is in labor, the host will not give them anything. The neighbor will understand this refusal because nothing is supposed to be taken away during labor or childbirth.

Some additional practices exist that aim to contribute to an easy delivery process. For example, if a pregnant woman hears good news about another woman's birth and quickly stands up from her place, this means that she will also deliver her future unborn infant safely. Some say that if a pregnant woman has seen a dog's childbirth,

this can contribute to her own easy childbirth. Consequently, many pregnant women wish for a 'dog's labor' (*it tolgoo*) because dogs usually give birth quickly to six or seven puppies.

The labor process does not only concern the pregnant woman; rather, this can be shared with the husband as well. Much folklore relates to this particular issue. If the man eats the desired food first before the pregnant woman, this means that the husband will take on the labor himself. If the pregnant woman's husband has to leave during the labor process, she will at least take some of his personal items to be by her side. Should the pregnant woman jump over the feet of her husband three times, it is believed that the husband will take on all of the labor himself, and that this labor would go away only after childbirth.

Childbirth is not an easy process, therefore, healers are invited to be present at the labor process. They would say that: "this is not my hand; this is the hand of the earth goddess *Umai ene* (*Mother Umai*)" (*Menin kolum emes, Umai enenin kolu*). By saying this, they ask for help from *Umai ene*. *Umai ene* is considered the oldest female deity of the Turkic peoples. She is a benevolent (*bayana*) spirit, and the patroness of children and women in childbirth. In other words, she is believed to be the guardian of women and children during childbirth.

The personification of the female principle is reflected in the very name of *Umai*, which means the womb of the mother, the uterus and even the severed umbilical cord. When sending children or even adults on a journey, mothers would say, that "we left you in the hands of *Umai ene*". When there is a bountiful harvest, people would say "*Umai ene's* breast gave us milk". If a child is left alone at home, their mother would say "I left the child into the hands of *Umai ene*". These and other aspects concerning children are associated with the actions of *Umai ene*. If a child smiled in a dream, it means that *Umai ene* was talking to the child. If an infant cries, people may think that the evil spirits scared them. Parents may explain to their child that this may be due to the fact that *Umai ene* was away for a while. A child's illness can be explained by *Umai ene's* absence. In this case, parents often turn to a shaman in such cases, who at the time of the ritual tries to find out whether the child's soul had been abducted by an evil spirit.

The symbolic image of *Umai* is an eagle or a bird. Therefore, many Kyrgyz hang a bird or eagle over the cradle as her symbolic representation. Thus, this is how the goddess-mother with comb-shaped gold hair is represented. The image of the bird or eagle, that represents *Umai*, is often found in Kyrgyz handmade embroidery. Such handmade embroidery (*saima*) is fabric decorated with a needle and thread.

When a young couple get married, they said '*Kush boo bek bolsun*', meaning literally "may the swarm of your flying bird be strong!" This is the wish of a newly-married couple on the day of their wedding to be strong and in the hope that the wife be obedient. The importance of the bird is also linked to the delivery process. If a woman had difficulties in the delivery process, an eagle is put near her. This way, there is a belief that the eagle will protect the woman from demonic beings (the main

danger that allegedly threatens women in labor). In addition to putting an eagle or bird near the bedside, Kyrgyz also put a gun on either the right side of the house or they shoot it in the sky to frighten the devil or demonic beings.

There are two types of rituals that can ease the delivery of an infant. The first is, when a chicken is brought from the yard and spun around the head of a pregnant woman and then slaughtered for consumption. The second is when a wolf's belly or stomach is considered sacred. If a woman is having difficulty giving birth, a wolf's stomach can be cleaned, dried, and softened by putting it into hot water, and the leather then placed on her head. In Kyrgyz folklore, by doing this practice, it is believed that the devil and a demonic creature in the image of a woman (allegedly harming the woman during childbirth and compressing the sleeper's throat) would immediately leave the woman.

Among Uzbeks

The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks value the delivery process quite similarly. For Uzbeks, the importance of children is similar to Kyrgyz in terms of leaving behind descendants. In the Uzbek tradition, one could also delve into local Uzbek culture and the oral heritage of Uzbeks through proverbs, folklore, and people's stories. For example, the Uzbeks say: '*bal shirin, baldan da bala shirin*', meaning that "honey is sweet but children are sweeter"; '*Balaluu üi-bazar, balasyz üi-mazar*' meaning that 'a house with many children is like a buzzing bazaar, a house without children is like a silent grave'; '*döölöttün bashy-perzent*' meaning that the main source of wealth is an infant; '*balalyk-padyshalyk*' implying that childhood is like a kingdom, i. e., children are like rulers; '*biröönün balasy kishmish berseng dagy turbait*' highlights that it is important to have one's own children because those of others would not take your side. These proverbs highlight the importance of children and how they are treated with respect and viewed as sweet. The Uzbeks wish their newlyweds not only to have children but to have a lot of them.

Once a bride moves into her husband's home, preparation for the unborn infant's well-being begins. In order to get pregnant, the young woman follows a number of rituals and rites. For example, she will bake bread in the oven, and while heating it, the firewood should be arranged in a certain way. Through these actions, the woman may become pregnant sooner. It can be hard for those who cannot get pregnant within a short period of time; however, the good news is spread immediately once the bride gets pregnant to a wide range of relatives.

Although it is better for a woman to get pregnant quickly, newlyweds may not always immediately have children because conceiving can take many years. This concerns not only the newlyweds, but their extended families and neighbors. In such cases, women may try different options, by using a traditional medical technique called *ysyktanuu* (steaming). This is when both the husband and wife eat a lot of hot food together. The meat of sheep and turkey belong to this particular category, but beef and chicken belong to cold food. Some male friends may drink cognac in order to sweat,

while rice pilaf can be prepared using the fat of a sheep's tail, which is considered one of the hottest types of food.

The newlyweds who would like to have a child may actively participate in the preparation of a special dish, *sumalak*. This dish is made from wheat, millet, and barley and its preparation time is almost 24 hours. During the preparation, the newlyweds will speak of their wishes and hopes. Another belief is that if seven stones are thrown into the dish, seven wishes would come true. *Sumalak* is a sacred food especially for those who wish to have children. Therefore, many young women become actively involved in its preparation together with their husbands.

Another important aspect is visiting sacred sites and praying to have children. Women often burn juniper, recite the Quran, and pray to have children. Sometimes women tie a ribbon or pieces of fabric to a branch of a tree with good will. Even though Islam prohibits such practices, some nevertheless practice these rituals and believe in the power of nature as well. Another belief states that if a pregnant woman desires a special dish or food, and this food is then accidentally eaten by an unmarried woman, then this woman would soon get married. Some women dry and eat the small pieces of skin after a boy's circumcision with bread. Others ask for the clothes of pregnant women. Meanwhile, some women will exchange clothing with other women who have had multiple children in order to expect a baby with the gender of their choice. Through this practice, they hope to transfer the sacredness, good qualities and dignity of that particular person.

After carefully practicing all these beliefs and superstitions, and if a woman suddenly becomes pregnant, the joy will not only be felt by the couple, but also by extended family members and neighbors. The status of the bride thus increases in the eyes of her parents-in-law. The pregnant woman would then do everything in order to carry her infant and not to lose them, such as not cutting her own hair; otherwise, there would be the fear that she might have shortened the infant's life. She would also not sit on a bag, because this could result in a difficult delivery.

Pregnant women are also not allowed to attend funerals. They can go to pray, but they must go straight home afterwards. If they do not follow these rules, they might lose a child in the future. Thus, a pregnant woman is supposed to think not only about the child's delivery but also about their future destiny. Among Uzbeks, there is folklore that if a pregnant woman drinks tea from a plate containing the grease left over from her meal, this implies that the infant baby will become beautiful. If an unmarried girl does the same, this indicates that she will get a handsome husband. If a woman cooks a dish using a ladle instead of a skimmer, there is a belief that the child's nose would look like the ladle. When making bread, if the sourdough is formed in a nice way this implies that the woman's future child's nose would be beautiful. If she puts aside some sourdough (as a starter for the next time to make dough for bread) from the dough, this implies that she wishes a long life for her husband.

The sex of the infant concerns not only the young family, but also the relatives of both the husband and wife. Now technology can assist young couples in discovering

the sex of the child before the birth; however, this was not possible before. Therefore, fortune tellers would guess the sex of the child and different superstitions existed in doing so also. It is important to highlight some of them here. For instance, a piece of round Uzbek bread would be baked by a pregnant woman, and if the bread was swollen and red spots had emerged on its surface, this meant that the woman was expecting a boy; while if the bread was not swollen, and red spots had not emerged, this meant that the woman was expecting a girl. If the woman slept on her right side, this meant that she would have a boy, and if she slept on her left side, this meant a girl. Some would guess the sex of the child before birth by looking at a sibling's nose: if the veins of the nose were visible and interlinked, this indicated a boy, while if the veins of the nose were not visible and there was no linkage of the veins, this suggested a girl.

In addition, there were also beliefs related to miscarriages. A pregnant woman was not supposed to walk alone during the night; otherwise this might lead to miscarriages. But a woman, who had previously suffered miscarriages, was expected to tie a scarf around her belly in order to keep it strong and to prepare it for carrying a child. Some women who had lost a child several times were advised to adopt a small puppy in order to prevent miscarriages from happening again in the future. For example, one woman, Kalyskhan Amanova, in the village Akhunbai of Andijan oblast, gave birth to 7 children, all of whom she lost, so, in order to prevent this from happening again, she adopted a small puppy. She then gave birth to another child after many years and gave milk to both her child and puppy at the same time, in order to save the life of her newborn baby. Since the child's birth was on the day of Eid al-Fitr which marks the end of Ramadan, she called her child Haitkhan. After many years, Haitkhan got married and told this story to her own children. One of Haitkhan's children went to the Humanities department of Osh State University and told the story to the author.

For some women to protect themselves from miscarriages, they eat swallow's eggs, believing that this will help them to give birth to healthy children without any complications during the pregnancy. If a girl is born after eating the eggs, the mother may believe that her daughter will be beautiful like a swallow and have swallow's eyebrows. Some women are encouraged to look at a beautiful person's photo in order for them to have beautiful children. Many women believe in bad and good angels, therefore, many try to believe in something very positive and good during the pregnancy.

If a pregnant woman wants to eat a specific desired food, it is important that by all means she eats this particular food; otherwise, Uzbeks believe that this can have negative consequences on the child in terms of being sick or handicapped once born. If fishermen give fish to a pregnant woman, it is believed that they will not catch any fish again in the future. Pregnant women are not allowed to consume any camel milk products, then there is a belief that her pregnancy will last for 12 months as camels are said to carry their baby for 12 months.

Pregnant women are not supposed to pour tea; otherwise the person who is drinking the tea might end up being sinful before God. This belief was created so that pregnant women would refrain from doing too much housework. In Uzbek culture,

women serve tea by leaning forward placing their left hand on their chest and giving the tea bowl with their right hand.

Should a pregnant woman be late in delivering her child, it may be suggested that she go to the mountains. Physical exercise is thought to lead to the intensification of the delivery. In order to wish a woman to deliver a child easier, relatives put pepper into the pregnant woman's pocket. Some mothers-in-law take a cup of flour and spin it three times around the head of the pregnant woman, saying – “may you have an easy delivery and may your child be happy and healthy”.

If the labor lasts for many hours, Uzbeks may believe that this might have a negative effect for the mother as well as for the child. In order to protect themselves from such fears, some rituals and superstitions are followed. Pregnant women are supposed to jump over a dog three times while wishing to have an easy delivery. This kind of practice can be observed among the Kyrgyz as well, which shows the cult of dogs between different Turkic groups.

One can find almonds, pistachios, and walnuts in almost every Uzbek household. Before a pregnant woman gives birth, she is given either almonds and pistachios, or walnuts with warm water. This is called *badam chai* and is made with 10-15 kernels of almonds are boiled in water for a few minutes. Uzbeks believe that only after this can a woman give birth, because homemade tea facilitates the delivery process and makes the body more relaxed.

Moreover, many Uzbek families do not inform their neighbors when the pregnant woman goes into labor. If a person who was supposed to accompany the pregnant woman cannot stay due to unexpected reasons, there is also a belief that the labor might go away with that person. If a pregnant woman's husband is far away, she may not be told about it because otherwise she may not want to give birth and rather wait until the husband arrives. In such cases, she might be told: ‘your husband is here, waiting for you outside’. Some of the husband's items such as a hat or handkerchief may be given to the woman as a sign that he is nearby. This shows the importance of having a close person around during childbirth and the need for moral support from that person.

Rituals after the Birth of a Child

Among Kyrgyz

When a child is born, the first thing many do is to cry. Folklore suggests that a child crying is related to the fact that they are already aware of the difficulties of life. The Kyrgyz explain a child's crying by assuming that all the worries are on the child's shoulder. If a child does not cry, this can be considered a worrying sign, and they may be disabled or in poor health. In other words, crying implies having a difficult life but also their strength and ability to survive in harsh environments.

Another interpretation is related to a child's hands. When a child is born, they may clench a fist, which can be a sign of the inherent greediness and avidity of humans.

Such a child may arrive with the idea that the whole world belongs to them, but after death, their palms would be open, implying that they could not get anything from the world. The idea behind this interpretation has some philosophical meanings as well and shows that power and wealth are temporary.

A child's umbilical cord is cut off with a sharp razor, then a small piece of felt is burnt and pressed onto the spot to cauterize it. A woman who cuts off a newborn's umbilical cord is called a 'cord mother' (*kindik ene*), and the child should always show respect and honor to this woman. A child comes into the world by saying 'I have seven mothers': their own mother, maternal grandmother, paternal grandfather, father's best friend's wife (*ayash apa*), mother-in-law, representative mother (*ökül apa*), and finally cord mother. The cord mother receives a sheep or goat, clothes, and other gifts for her service. The organ placenta (also known as the 'afterbirth'), which connects the fetus with the mother, is buried somewhere where people do not walk. The placenta is given to the mother's closest relatives and they hide it, so that no one can find it. There is a belief that if the hidden placenta is taken away by someone, it means that the person wants to do something bad to the mother. This also has a negative effect on the possibility of having more children for the mother in the future. Some sources say that if the placenta is given to a dog with the intention of having a healthy spirit, then the mother has a greater chance in having more children in the future.

Children or close relatives usually spread good news (i. e. the birth of a child) among relatives, neighbors, and friends. This news is termed in Kyrgyz language *süiünchü*, which means a gift of the message of joyful news. It is not possible for a person who told the joyful news to go home without a gift. This includes a monetary gift or small livestock (sheep, goats). If a boy was born, people would say *süiünchü börü* meaning a wolf was born, and if a girl was born, people would say *süiünchü tülkü* meaning a fox was born. Two main reasons exist for associating a wolf with a boy and a fox with a girl. First, the qualities or characters of a wolf are similar to those of a boy and the qualities or characters of a fox are similar with those of a girl; second, by calling children a wolf or fox, parents intend to protect their children from the evil eye.

Another interesting association between a girl and horses exist among the Kyrgyz. Some Kyrgyz say that if a girl is born, the relatives are told that they have received 40 horses, which relates to the fact that 40 horses is the future bride-price of the girl. This association is briefly mentioned in the first comprehensive dictionary of Turkic languages, the *Dīwān Lughāt at-Turk* by Mahmud ibn Hussayn ibn Muhammed al-Kashgari²².

The first stage after a child is born is called *The First Forty Days*, and this period shows caution for the child for several reasons. After the seventh day, a newborn child

²² Mahmud ibn Hussayn ibn Muhammed al-Kashgari was a scholar and lexicographer of the 11th century. Originally, he was from Kashgar and considered himself as Uyghur. His father's name was Hussayn, and he was the mayor of Barsgan, a small town in the southeastern part of the Issyk-Kul lake. At the moment, this place is called Barskoon, which is located in Issyk-Kul region.

is put in a cradle. During this day the parents invite only close people by baking bread, preparing food and slaughtering sheep. The guests bring gifts and bless the child to have a good life.

The cradle is viewed by the Kyrgyz as a sacred item and as a gift from ancestors; therefore, a newborn child is put in the cradle while a number of interrelated rituals are performed. The cradle is also practical for the movement of people from one place to another. Among nomads, usually the cradle is taken care of by the mother. Even if the cradle falls, the child is not harmed because the cradle has a safety belt fastened around the child. The belt is fastened as tightly as possible around the child's body for security reasons. The cradle is provided by the young mother's natal family as a gift for their first grandson or granddaughter.

The mother gets a lot of support throughout the first 40 days from her female relatives. The child is washed on a regular basis. Many families add some salt into the child's washing water. The child is not supposed to be walked outside in the street but rather people try to hide the child and show them only when there are no outsiders in view. Close relatives, friends, and neighbors do not bother the mother and child during the 40 days and understand the importance of them being together, isolated from outside influence and eyes. Psychologically, this period is crucial for the mother and child to adapt to each other, while the mother's organism slowly returns to its pre-birth condition. Due to these reasons, the first 40 days are considered sacred days for both mother and child.

The mother is not supposed to put her hands into cold water or to touch any cold stones; otherwise, the child will become hard-hearted and unsympathetic. It is prohibited for the child's name to be uttered; rather, the family members use the names of animals instead (like 'puppy' or 'lamb') as a way to protect the child from the evil eye or evil demons. If a neighbor comes and asks for some household items, the hosts refuse, because it is believed that the outsider might take some of the family's well-being out of the house without being aware of it. On the contrary, the mother is encouraged within the first 40 days to go to neighbors' houses and to ask for forty different kinds of fabric or material in order to sew or stitch a dress for herself.

The second stage goes beyond the first 40 days, which is called *kyrkyn chygaruu* (marking the first forty days). During this day, neighbors and close relatives are invited to give their blessings and to help bathe the child. In return, the hosts bake 40 fried pieces of bread and prepare food for the guests. The elderly women wish all the best for the child's health and bathe the baby in a basin. Before doing this, 40 spoonful of water are added to the basin full of water. Some might wish a lot of cattle for the child by adding 40 sheep droppings (*korgol*). Interestingly enough, washing a child with 40 spoonful of water is practiced by many different Central Asian peoples. Nevertheless, each Central Asian ethnic group has its own peculiarities, among which the Turkmen add 40 grains of wheat, sheep droppings, 40 small sticks, egg shells; while among Uzbeks, they add a lump of dry clay, coins, egg shells; while finally among the Kazaks, they add silver coins. Many of the Turkic-speaking population add salt into the washing water of the newborn child.

In the old days, salt was believed to have qualities that could protect a person from harm, lesions, and any damage in general. Therefore, many Central Asian ethnic groups would strew salt on the head or feet of the child before they would walk. In this way, they would protect their children from harm because of the strong qualities of salt, which include eternity, trustworthiness, and stability. If meat is spoiled, salt helps to rid it of the smell. Many practice the culinary art of salted meat in order to keep or preserve it for a long time. Salt helps people in many ways, especially in protecting and preserving their food. Thus, people see the importance of salt's qualities in terms of the protection and security of human beings. Once a child is washed in salty water, the leftover water is then poured into soil near a tree, with wishes that the tree will yield more fruits. It is important to highlight a few meanings attached to the word *salt* (*tuz*) and meanings attached to salt in general.

One may notice the frequent usage of the word 'salt' in conversations between local people. If someone invites someone to taste their food, the host will say *tuz buiruu* or *tuz tatau*, which literally translates into "try our salt"; however, the meaning is to try our food, to eat together, to taste bread and salt, and to enjoy the hospitality. If people spend time together and live side by side, they use the term *tuzdash-daamdash boluu* meaning to know each other well and to be friendly to one another. If one takes on another person's responsibility, this is called *tuzun aktoo*, meaning to be thankful or justified. If one becomes successful or lucky, people use the phrase *tuzu kötörülүү*, meaning that "the salt has been increased". In contrast, if a good deed has been repaid by evil or ungratefulness, and with ingratitude, this is called *tuzuna kara sanoo*, meaning that that person has bad intentions, thoughts, and intentions, and therefore one should be careful. The meaning of the term *tuzu aram* is to be depraved, ungrateful, and ingratitude. The phrase *tuz ursun* means that a person will be cursed by salt and punished.

On the fortieth day, a child's first shirt, called a 'dog's shirt' (*it köinök*), is taken off and another shirt made of 40 different pieces of cloth is provided. The child's mother specially prepared the shirt for the fortieth day by collecting different pieces of cloth from the neighboring houses. Before putting the new shirt on the child, two elderly women put forty pieces of small fried bread (*boorsok*) into the shirt's sleeves and swing it by holding it from two sides, wishing the child good luck, long life, and strong health. The 40 pieces of bread are distributed among the guests, so that the blessing is widely spread across the guests' families. Many consider this special baby shirt as valuable as the Quran, but this ritual existed before the arrival of Islam.

Another ritual is related to the cutting of a child's hair (*chach aluu*) on the fortieth day. It is believed that the child's hair should be cut in order to properly transfer a child from 40 days and beyond. The hair of the child is then hidden somewhere so that no one can find it. Hair is treated by the Kyrgyz with care and attention. The Kyrgyz believe that hair possesses sacred qualities, and that the life of a human being is located in their hair, which is linked to animistic beliefs. The reason behind such a belief is that hair is constantly growing, which symbolizes the endlessly growing life

of human beings. Therefore, the Kyrgyz see hair's unique qualities and its relation to developing, growing, and constantly changing qualities.

Moreover, hair also has protective qualities, which are vivid in the Kyrgyz language. For example, if someone threatens someone, the response might be 'my soul was almost outside' or 'my hair stood up', meaning that the person is afraid. When people are stressed and have many problems, this condition is referred to as "hair whitening" or "turning grey". Therefore, one can see if a person has problems from their hair. In other words, hair mirrors the internal condition of a human being. In difficult times, people can say that life is on a hair's edge. Meanwhile, many express their sympathy towards children by stroking their hair.

According to the famous Soviet ethnologist S. M. Abramzon, the mother's brother would cut the child's first hair. In return, he would bring some clothes and a head of cattle as a gift for the child. Abramzon also highlighted the importance of children's having a flat forelock, starting from the middle of the head and covering the eyebrow line.²³ The idea of the forelock was to wish the child a long life. The name of the forelock in Kyrgyz is *kökül chach*; however, the epic *Manas* also highlights the existence of hair on the top of the head, which used to be called *aidar*. The Kyrgyz have their own folk tale, entitled '*Karach, Kökül baiany*'! This tale is about a rich man who got his first child (son), named *Kökül*, by the time he was older than 60. In order to protect him from the evil eye, his son was raised under the earth. So, the Kyrgyz interchangeably use the words '*aidar*' and '*kökül*' for forelock, but most of the time '*kökül*' is used. Apparently, '*niyaz*' is another word used for forelock, used by the Kyrgyz from the Ichkilik tribe. In the old days, people carefully paid attention to the forelock by believing that it is a debt to be paid back, so parents who decided to grow their child's forelock had to give their neighbor one piece of bread per day for up to seven days.

The belief in the sacredness of hair remains until this day among the Kyrgyz. If a woman's children were passing away constantly, and she had made a pilgrimage to a sacred site while she was pregnant, she would return to that sacred site to cut her child's hair. An infertile woman would buy a child's first hair from that sacred site with the good intention of having a child herself. It was also believed that if a woman did not regularly cut the child's hair, the child might constantly get sick and become weak.

The Kyrgyz pay close attention not only to the child's first hair, but also to adult's hair. A woman who lost her child would not burn her hair, otherwise, her child might think of her mother as burning in the hell. Therefore, the child might jump into a fire to save his mother. There is an interesting example in the history of Kyrgyz people in this regard. According to the famous writer, Tölögön Kasymbekov, the country's female hero, Kurmanjan Datka had a son Kamchybek, whose wife's hair was cut by Russian soldiers, and for that these Russian soldiers were killed. After being trimmed,

²³ Abramzon, S. M. *Kirgizy ih etnogeneticheskie i istoriko-kul'turnye svyazi*, Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1990, p. 282.

hair is usually collected and buried in a hidden place, usually under a fruit tree as a wish for many descendants. Hiding the hair in safe places and elevated locations reflects a wish that the person whose hair is buried will be respected and that their authority and dignity will remain high. Therefore, the most respected brother of the mother would cut the child's first hair. Adult women are not supposed to cut an adult man's hair and vice-versa; otherwise it is believed that men will lose their energy and become weak-willed and sluggish. If a child's hair does not grow, her/his hat will be smelled by a donkey, perhaps because donkeys have thick and strong hair on their skin.

When a girl washes or combs her hair, she should collect the shed hair and hide it. According to local perceptions of beauty, a girl's long hair has some significant meanings. Many young girls collect the roots of reeds and put them into water for 40 days. Before sunrise, the girls wash their hair with this water and afterwards there is the belief that their hair will remain long and strong like the reeds.

The Kyrgyz believe in an evil spirit strangles people in dreams, especially pregnant women. The evil spirit's name is Albarsty, who strangles pregnant women during delivery of their child. Many may remember the feeling when, in a dream, no matter how hard they try, they are unable to move or say anything. No power can stop Albarsty and in such cases it is advised to rip out Albarsty's hair. By doing so, Albarsty would fulfill all possible desires that the person asleep might have. This hair should never be destroyed, since Albarsty is a spirit of vengeance, a spirit of fire. Special people who had ripped out Albarsty's hair are invited to the house where a pregnant woman is experiencing complications during her delivery to drive away the evil spirit which is believed to be causing harm to the woman. Such people tear out Albarsty's hair and hide it in the Quran or under their boot's sole so that Albarsty could not take the hair.

Another important belief relates to the human head. Among the Kyrgyz it is prohibited to hit a child's head. If someone hits a child's head, this person's first child might die. It is not possible to jump over someone's head. Even in wrestling, if a participant jumps over their opponent's head, the losing side would be very offended by it act of the winner. Even though the Kyrgyz have lost many of their traditional clothes, their traditional hats, especially men's *ak kalpak* has remained. This feature highlights the importance of the head among the Kyrgyz; therefore, many prohibitions still exist in relation to the head and the hat. Hats are always stored in a high place and it is prohibited to play with them by spinning them with a hand or to give or sell them to anyone.

On the fortieth day, not only is a child's hair cut but also their nails. Like hair, nails are considered sacred due to their growth and other qualities. Nails are not to be trampled on, thrown into water, burned in a fire, or cut in the evening; otherwise, it is believed that the nails might be destroyed. If a person washes their hands before and after cutting their nails, there is a belief that the person will become rich and be protected from the evil eye. If someone's nails are crisscrossed, it is believed that their

parents will start fighting and that this will intensify. The cutting of a child's first nails has some special rules, prohibitions, beliefs, and regulations attached to this practice. Usually, a girl's nails will be cut by a skilled craftsman or a good needlewoman; while a boy's nails will be cut by a master craftsman. The idea behind this is to wish that the child's hands will be like those of the craftsman. Another notion is that if a craftsman cuts a child's nails, the nails will grow beautiful and straight. In addition, while cutting the nails, if a book is put above the child's hands, this implies that the child will become educated, intelligent, and smart.

Every child should be brought up clean, dry and healthy. So, whenever a child cries, parents are obliged to calm the child and put them in a cradle. The materials, forms, aesthetic tastes and qualities of the cradle are linked to where, how and in which environmental conditions the child is brought up. The Kyrgyz call the cradle *beshik*. Meanwhile, there is another type of cradle for newborn infants, called *kundak*. This is made of sheep wool or camel wool and is designed like a thick bag or blanket, on which the newborn lies before being put into the cradle. Wool can keep the child warm in cold seasons and cool in the heat, but the bag's cover can be made from several different kinds of fabrics. This is very convenient especially when people move from one place to another in different seasons: for instance, in times of cold, it is possible to hang it in the yurt; while when warm, it is possible to put it in a cool place. One can see the usage of the bag (*kundak*) in the epic tale *Manas*. When Manas was born, his father was congratulated by saying: "May the cord of your cradle be strong and may God bless your *kundak's* cords." Nowadays *kundak* are not used anymore, they have been replaced by *beshik*.



Cradles being sold at the bazaar. (Photo by the author).

The child is put in the cradle after seven days. Traditionally, a new cradle is brought by the child's maternal grandmother (*taiene*). Before putting a child in the cradle, a few rituals are performed. In order to remove the evil eye, demons, and evil spirits from the cradle, a juniper branch is burnt around it. Once this process is over, a respected woman with a lot of children puts the child in the cradle by wishing them a lot of good things and greasing the *shimek* (a tube for draining the urine, inserted between the legs of the child lying in the cradle). Several *chükö* (knee bone of a sheep) are taken and put on the cradle's mat for a special ritual. When the woman lifts the cradle's head side, the *chükös* roll down into the cradle's drainage. While doing this, the woman says: "*bar bol*" (have a long life!) or "*ong bol*" (be the right one!).

Before putting the newborn infant into the cradle, the women say: "*go away demons, the owner came*" and sing: "*Cradle mother, hold the child tight, Umai mother, give good sleep*". The women should not talk during this process, so they bite a *boorsok* in their mouth in order to make sure that the child would not be whiny. The mother is given a blanket, a basket, a bag and other important items for the cradle. She takes the cradled child into her hands and bows to all those who are present. While doing this, many elderly and respected women bless the mother and the child and wish them a long and healthy life. Some also put hoes, axes, picks, and other types of equipment into the cradle to wish the child that once they grow up, they will have a good work ethic.



Rituals performed before putting a baby into a cradle.²⁴

²⁴ Source: <http://kutbilim.journalist.kg/>

In order to make the life of a boy strong, women bring axes from the yard and place them below the cradle. The *chükö*, one of the symbols of *Umai* mother, is tied to the cradle, because it is believed that *Umai* protects the child's life. The Kyrgyz believe that after tying the *chükö* to the cradle, the child will sleep well. Moreover, some cover the cradle with nine items of clothes belonging to those regarded as being 'sleepy' by nature, in hopes that the child will sleep well. Having a good sleep is necessary for the mother to do her household tasks and to have more time for herself to rest. While a child is being put in the cradle, no person should leave the room as by leaving the room the person might take the baby's sleep with him/her. However, children who whine are well accepted by the Kyrgyz, and it is believed that a whiny child will become a tough person in the future and contribute to their parents' long life.

A number of prohibitions are associated with the cradle. For example, it is prohibited to rock an empty cradle; otherwise the person [who is rocking the cradle] might not have any children in the future. One should not move a cradle by kicking or step over it. A child should not be passed above a cradle; but rather the child is supposed to be passed across it. It is prohibited to lift a cradle from two sides, because this resembles the lifting process of a deceased person during a funeral; therefore, in order to avoid this negative image such actions are avoided. Two persons are not allowed to rock the cradle at the same time. Should a cradle be taken outside, it is important to take it with the bottom side of the cradle first rather than from the head side. It is not possible to negotiate a cradle's price; rather, the given price is to be accepted because bargaining is not considered as acceptable in this case and is viewed negatively. However, the cradle's seller should not make the cradle expensive and should offer its genuine price.

It is important to know how a cradle is made. Usually, cradles are made from juniper trees. Sometimes a child might have red spots on the body, which can be explained by the fact that the worms of the cradle are biting the child. In this case the mattress used is taken outside to lie under the sun. But the cradle is not put under the sun to kill the worms. However, people are aware of the juniper tree's quality, which is mainly characterized as being good, strong, and antiseptic. The juniper lives for a thousand years, and people say that this is because the tree drinks the water of immortality. Therefore, cradles are made of juniper in hopes that the child will have a long life like the tree. Parents wished a great future for their child by saying "The baby who is in the cradle now might become a tribal leader in the future" (*Beshiktegi balanyn bek bolorun kim bilet*). The cradle is kept clean; otherwise the Kyrgyz believe that Albarsty or a demon spirit will dominate the cradle. If the cradle is taken outside for a while, it is not to be left outside. In particular, the cradle should not be seen by the stars. If the cradle is left outside, it is believed that a demon spirit takes over the cradle and makes the child weak.

The cradle is to be transferred from one child to another. In order to clean the cradle, it is wrapped and put in a bread barn or mill bucket. Some will temporarily give the cradle to an infertile woman, and she will keep it for a while until she gives birth.

Should this be successful, the cradle's owner will get a lot of gifts from the pregnant woman. The pregnant woman may even ask to keep the cradle.

Should a newborn child pass away, the cradle is destroyed or burnt. Some bring the cradle to the cemetery and leave it there. Through these actions, the parents accept the child's death, but they believe that the demons remain in the cradle; hence, they destroy it before the birth of their next child. But should someone accidentally find the discarded cradle and bring it home, this means that the person will have a child soon. Some items (bones, teeth, nails, and skins of wolfs, leopards, bears, owls, snakes or eagles) are tied to the cradle so as to protect the child from the evil eye. Other items, including hawthorn sticks, silver coins, amulets, and short writings from the Quran, contribute to the well-being and safety of the child. These items are not only confined to the cradle, but the Kyrgyz put them also on the child's clothes, wrists, or around their necks.

Among Uzbeks

The rituals related to a child's birth take a special place among Uzbek families and households. These are important events to ensure that a child and mother are protected from evil forces that can predetermine a newborn's fate. The Uzbeks are fairly persistent in believing that the first 40 days of a baby's life are especially dangerous, and therefore the child should not be left alone. After a child's birth, a midwife bathes them in warm water. The women may add salt into the water and hope that it will protect the newborn from sores. In some places a child is bathed right after birth, while in others they are bathed seven days later. The first bathing ceremony is attended by close family members, with the midwife the only outsider present. The newborn is then wrapped up by relatives in rags left over from old shirts, dressing gowns, or in a quilted shirt or an old man's robe. This is supposed to contribute to the child's longevity.

A newborn child's main source of nutrition was and is still their mother's milk. Ideally, the mother would breast feed for as long as possible. If the mother's milk is not enough, they prepare additional porridge for their newborn children. Another source is sheep fat, and this is given in addition to porridge. After feeding, the mother is busy doing household tasks, and in the meantime siblings or other children in the house will rock the cradle. Sometimes, a young mother's younger sister or her own mother will help her with raising a child. Usually it is not the responsibility of men to take care of a newborn child; and doing so is considered shameful. In addition, a newborn child is not allowed to be kissed by their fathers, rather is it preferred that they kiss the child's hands. This is related to hygienic reasons, to keep the child clean and to protect them from various viruses.

The first 40 days are crucial for the child's entire family; therefore, during these days many prohibitions and superstitions exist in order to prevent something bad from happening. One such is that a mother is not supposed to touch or hold a needle

during the first 40 days, as it is believed that by doing so the child might get sick, become unhealthy or an invalid. Moreover, a mother is not supposed to hold any cold things in her hands, like iron or stone, in the belief that her child would become unpleasant, unsympathetic, ungracious, and unkind. A mother is also prohibited from carrying heavy stuff. In addition, she is not allowed to go outside her home or to talk to strangers, or even to people she knows, such as acquaintances and neighbors. She should not be around women with newborns, because this can intensify the danger two-fold. These prohibitions are needed in order to protect the mother from negative forces and certain influences due to women's weakness after childbirth and their heightened susceptibility to catching illnesses and an inability to resist harmful forces. Another explanation is that a mother is considered unclean; therefore, she might contaminate items and products that she touches.

Uzbeks do not leave the newborn child's clothes, toys, or other things outside of the house overnight in order to protect the child from evil spirits and demons. A newborn child is not shown to everybody who wants to see them, and it is especially prohibited to see a newborn child in the evening, especially by relatives and neighbors. It is also prohibited to bring raw and uncooked meat into the house where the newborn child is living for the first 40 days. The child's body looks like meat (i.e. red); therefore, this would imply some negative connotation. After the first 40 days it is possible to bring raw meat into the house; however, some people prefer to keep this tradition going for longer until the child has grown up. The first 40 days is believed to be a dangerous time for a child's life, which might also affect the child's future fate. If a newborn child is a girl, it is prohibited to take her outside, so that she will not grow up to become an informer or a sneak. If a newborn child is a boy, he is not to be shown to neighbors or relatives, in order to prevent him from becoming a liar. Should a boy be taken to a relative's house, the parents will smear the child's mouth with butter.

This ritual of marking the 40th day is usually organized together with the mothers-in-law, close relatives, and neighbors. During this day, the child is bathed, with slightly salted water. The required water temperature is determined by the elbow or the back of the hand. If a child is bathed in salted water, this means that the salt removes all the bad things from the child's body. Additionally, salt, clay from walls, coins, and eggshells are added into the water to protect the newborn from sores. After bathing the child, the women take out the coins and keep them for themselves with wishes of having such grandchildren. In order to make the life of the newborn sweet, some add sugar into the water. It is believed that using a wooden spoon to bathe the child will make the child grow up being a kind, rich, and helpful person in the future. The bathwater is then thrown onto tree roots, so that the child will grow up and have many offspring in the future like a tree.

Much attention is paid to the exact day for washing a child. Usually, the child is not bathed on Fridays until he or she is 5 years old. But later, once the child has grown up enough and has started to eat together with other family members in the

household, they are supposed to be washed on a regular basis, especially their hands and face. There is folklore that a clean child becomes compassionate towards his/her parents in the future; therefore, parents and siblings encourage children to regularly wash their face and hands.

After the end of the first 40 days, guests usually come to the child's family and celebrate this occasion together. The guests are treated with a lot of delicious food, fruits, and drinks. The guests come to the house of the woman who gave birth to congratulate her and to look at the child. In addition, children in the street are given sweets, dried fruits, and small round Uzbek bread (*külchö*), in hopes that the newborn child will grow up and play like them in the future. Sometimes a small round bread or a knife is also put on the head of the child, wishing them to sleep well and to protect them from negative forces and evil spirits. There would always be beads with the image of the eyes (*köz monchok*), hanging on a child's clothes and supposedly protecting them from the evil eye. There is the belief that the white sign on black or navy-colored beads would fall down if the child wearing those beads has been jinxed.

Once the eyes of the bead have fallen down, this implies that the bead has lost its power and therefore it is important to hang a new one for the child. This particular belief existed even before the arrival of Islam. Islam prohibits using the beads and all the beliefs and practices associated with them. In Islam, it is believed that God will be offended if one starts to have beads and believing in them. One can clearly see how the arrival of Islam completely changed the belief in beads. Despite the prohibitions, some people still believe in the beads and their associated power.

In the old days, people believed that the soul existed and could leave the human body at any time. Once the soul was separated from the human body, it could survive independently from the body. Many people still believe in this, but the question of the soul's location in the body provokes controversial views and opinions among some people. This is because it is possible to see how hair and nails grow, and many feel that the soul lives in the hair and nails. This belief has been the faith of many people for many years. For example, all kinds of bans and prohibitions related to the child's hair and nails are associated with the soul, which is especially relevant in the first 40 days after a child's birth.

The hair of a newborn child is not to be cut. The Uzbeks' have faith in the protective qualities of a newborn's hair, therefore many make an amulet out of some tufts of hair and sew it on the child's clothes. Sometimes, hair is hidden in a hole in a wall or under the floor of a house or wrapped in a white cloth and put at the bottom of a fruit tree (apricots, apples). When a person dies, he is buried together with this tuft of hair. An unwritten rule is that hair should be cut either in the 3rd or 5th month of the year. If the hair is cut during these months, people believe that the child will not have headaches. But at the same time, people worry that by cutting a child's hair, they might put the child's life at risk because they believe that their soul is in their hair. Controversy surrounds the cutting of a newborn's hair in the first 40 days, with some opposed and others not.

As a result, cutting a child's nails is prohibited within the first 40 days after their delivery. Only after the first 40 days can the child be taken outside and given the Quran book to scratch while his nails are being cut. During this action, the child's nails are cut short. It is believed that such a child when they grow up will become a religious person; meanwhile, if a child is given only a simple book, they will become a knowledgeable person; and if a master craftsman cuts a boy's nails and a master needlewoman or handicraft cuts a girl's nails, their talent and craftsmanship will transfer to the children and their future professional activities will be related to craftsmanship. Those families who did not have children would take the hair of one of their relative's children and would save it by braiding it. If the child has a forelock, this means that they will become a spiritual guide or leader in the future. Some children are born with long hair, which is considered sacred. Their hair is cut usually at sacred sites and, in the process of cutting, a juniper branch is burnt.

Another important stage for a newborn child involves the cradle. For that, a special feast is organized. The Uzbeks do not buy any clothes or a cradle in advance before the birth of the child, from fear of negative consequences. Putting a child in a cradle is accompanied by a set of rituals and the participation of many people. During the feast, divorced women are neither welcome nor invited.



A baby is about to be placed inside a cradle. (Photo by the author).

There are also a few prohibitions and superstitions associated with the cradle. It is not possible to rock the empty cradle; this is akin to the swinging of the *shaitan* or the devil. Should a cat go in the cradle, this can bring negative consequences, which may even result in the death of the child. Two people are not allowed to lift the cradle from two sides, because this resembles carrying the body of the deceased at a funeral. Usually, the cradle is brought to the first child of a young family, so that subsequent children can use the same one. The cradle is considered sacred; therefore, it is not thrown away. A cradle can be used in a family for many generations of children. Only the tube is changed depending on the sex of the child in the cradle. Before putting the child in the cradle, the burning of wild rue (*peganum harmala*) is needed to clean the cradle of evil spirits. This plant is a very popular tool among Uzbeks both for spiritual practices as well as folk medicine.

When a mother puts her child in the cradle, she says three times: 'I would put my child in the cradle', 'I would put my stony child in the cradle', and 'go away strangers, the owner of the cradle came'. The idea behind this is to inform loudly the hidden evil spirits about the child in the cradle and to ask them to leave the cradle. When a child is tied in the cradle, dried fruit, sugar, and sweets are spread over the cradle, while saying: "*Bismilla*". The sweets are picked up and eaten by the women who are present in the room, in the hope that this would help them to also have children. Uzbek mothers sing lullaby songs while rocking the cradle and putting their children to sleep. In this way, the Uzbeks introduce the child to the real world, their native language, and their mothers.

Naming Newborn Children

Among Kyrgyz

One of the village elders or *mullahs* is invited and asked to name newborn infants. Usually, the name of the infant is accompanied by the proclamation of the *azan*, a call for prayer, and after that the infant is given their name. The name should consist of the parent's future hopes for their child. Name giving is a very important event in the life of a person because all of the good and bad things a person will do are interconnected to their given name. As a result, the Kyrgyz try to prevent their children from bad deeds in advance by carefully selecting and giving good names. While bringing up children and even in everyday conversation, the Kyrgyz always highlight the importance of the family's name, by constantly repeating the statement: "Do not shame our name" and or those who do not have any children say: "Our names will disappear or become lost". So, one can see how important it is for a person to be given a suitable name.

The Kyrgyz pay a lot of attention to the names of their children. The following proverb illustrates this point well: 'if you want your name to be recognized, then burn the earth' which implies you can become "famous" or get people's attention by acting weirdly. Through people's names, one can delve into the cultural, educational, and aesthetic nature of the Kyrgyz. However, previously, it was possible to come across 'unpleasant' names like Sasyk (stinky), Shaltak (dirty), Bokbasar (shit stepper), and

Tezekchi (dung collector), but there were good reasons for giving such names to certain children. In the past, some families could not conceive for a long time; thus, by giving a child a bad name they would hope to protect the child from evil spirits, demons, devils, death, and evil eyes, who would potentially come and chase the child away upon their delivery. They believed that only by giving bad or unpleasant names would these negative forces bypass the child and leave them alone for a long time.

There was an illustrative example in the epic *Manas*. K k t i-khan fathered a child when he was already old (in fact, he found that child) and was afraid that he would not be able to protect it. For that reason, the name Bokmurun (snot nose) was given to protect the child from evil spirits. In the past, it was possible to give the child two names. The first name was for when the child was small and their parents would choose a name by randomly asking relatives, friends, and children who came to their house; in doing so, they hoped to protect the child from the evil eye or evil spirits, which might negatively affect the child's well-being and health. The second name was for when the child was grown up and would select their own name depending on their personal qualities, character, and contribution to the community. If parents kept constantly losing children, names such as Toktosun (May he stop) or Toktobek (May be a strong stop) were given to stop the losses. The Kyrgyz believed in the power of names in preventing negative actions from taking place.

An example of the name Toktogul (stop God's slave) comes from the famous Kyrgyz poet Toktogul Satylganov. Both his name and his father's name were related to the word 'stop' because both of them came from families whose children were often passing away upon their delivery. If some families had only daughters and wanted to stop the process of having only daughters, they would give names meaning changing direction or simply to become a boy, such as Jangyl (to slip, mistake, stumble), Boldukyz (enough daughters), Burul (to turn), Burulsun (it should be turned), Kubul (to change, to be unstable; to turn into different colors, shades; to take a different view), Uulkan (to become or to be a son), Ongol (to correct, to improve, and to make some amendments), and  m t (to hope or hope to have a boy), in the hope that they would have a son or sons.

An example from the epic *Manas* shows how the richest man Jakyp got a child when he was older than 50. He invited many guests, mainly friends and relatives, to a feast and asked the elders of the community to choose a good name for his son, but they could not come up with one. This uncomfortable situation is described in the epic in the following way:

Please give a name
 The respected man Jakyp approached
 Many people who came to the feast and started his speech
 The name should come from the sky or heaven
 It was hoped to find a good name
 This was the hope from Jakyp

Suddenly, a prophetic elder in a white cap came to the crowd during the feast and gave the name Manas. In the old days among Turkic peoples, apparently the elders of the community or tribal leaders could name a child. A name which means from the sky or heaven implied that the child was a sacred gift from God. The ancestors or forefathers believed that when a person was born, their star would be born in the sky as well. In this regard, the elders of the community were regarded as having the necessary qualities to select the best names. But after the spread of Arab culture in the 10th²⁵ century in Central Asia, this social obligation was replaced by calendars, dervishes, or *mullahs*.

Usually the names given to their children are associated with birds, plants, and animals. As for wild animals, these names include those which mean a lion, a tiger, a wolf, a leopard, a bear and a wild cat. In terms of bird, this could be an eagle, a merlin, a golden eagle, or a falcon. Among plants, a flower, an estragon, a juniper, a camelthorn and wild garlic were all known. The reason behind giving such fauna- and flora-related names is to hope that the child would be strong, brave, and courageous, reflecting the qualities possessed by those above-mentioned fauna and flora species. In addition, some Kyrgyz hold totemic beliefs in certain wild animals and birds, therefore these are highly valued. The Kyrgyz forefathers or ancestors prohibited the consumption of such wild animals and spicy and barbed plants because they believed that they all possessed souls just like human beings.

Additionally, the Kyrgyz may name their children after inanimate objects. Of these, the most popular are stone (*Tash*) and iron (*Temir*). The stone-related names include Tashbai (rich like a stone), Tashybek (strong like a stone), and Bektash (stone strong). In the Turkic-speaking world, the name Temir is very popular as it is widely believed that the name has a magical strength and transformative qualities of power and strength for the child. Another common name is Tashtemir (stone iron).

The foldable, commensurate and rhythmic names for twin boys include: Asan-Üsön, Janysh-Baiysh, Emil-Edil and Babur-Timur. Among twin girls Batma-Zuura was the most popular but now Apal-Üpöl, Ainagül-Jainagül, and Nurperi-Gülperi are more common. Usually, twins should wear the same clothes as is expected by local culture. As the Kyrgyz explain, this practice may prevent bad accidents from occurring if they look alike, as negative forces would be unable to distinguish and separate between the two. In addition, their shoes or socks should not be the same color, size, and type as this implies that the twins would not follow their own paths in life. The twins' cradles are not to be put side by side, in the belief that if someone came to the house and saw the cradles, the person would leave their evil eye.

According to local custom, finding, choosing, and giving a child's name in advance of their birth is prohibited; however, there can be some violations of this in exceptional circumstances. Some mothers claimed that they heard how their unborn child was crying while pregnant. When this kind of child is born, they are not shown

²⁵ Some argue the expansion of Islam in the 16th century in Central Asia.

to anyone for 40 days in order to protect them from evil spirits. According to some, a child with such qualities will become either very famous or spoilt. In such cases, the names Mashrapgül and Sharipa would be suggested for girls, while for boys, the name Mashrap and Sharip or the name Iskender is strongly recommended. The idea behind giving such names would be to prevent the child from becoming spoilt and to become famous instead.

If upon birth, the teeth are located on the bottom row, it is believed that the child would be happy in their life and contribute to the community as a leader. In contrast, if the child's teeth are located on the top row, then this is considered as dangerous, while many may have fears or concerns about the child's future. So, people consider bottom teeth upon birth as a good sign, but teeth on the top are associated with fear and uncertainty.

There were also cases where some babies were born with teeth. In that case, the baby was given the name "Wolf" (Börü, Börübay or Börükul, if it was a boy, and Börüköz, if it was a girl). People feared that if the baby was not given such a name, he or she would die, or the siblings who were born after him/her would die.

Among Uzbeks

From childhood, the Uzbeks raise their children religiously. The Islamic tradition and related customs are stronger among the Uzbeks than the Kyrgyz. Together with the joy of birth, parents are grateful to Allah. In Islam, the provisions regulating the actions of parents and their relatives in connection with the birth of a child in the family are clearly stipulated. These provisions should be followed to ensure that children are raised following the correct religious rules. Right after a child is born, a *mullah* or respected elderly man from the community will come and shout the name in the child's ear. As such, many Uzbek names come from Islam or have associations with the religion.

Apparently, there are 99 names that underline the holiness of God; therefore, it is essential that a child's name is given according to these names. If a child receives one of these names, it is considered a reward. These names include: Rahman, Rahim, Malik, Mumin, Gafar, Kakhor, Vahab, Razak, Fattah, Alim, Hakam, Azim, Gafur, Shukur, Karim, Hakim, Majit, Hamid, Kayum, Samad, Zakir, Vali, Gani, Rashid, and Sabur. Lately, it has become popular to give the names of famous people or khans throughout history, such as Muhammed, Zhahongir, Temur, Shohruh, Ulugbek, and Babur. In the past, such names were not given to children, as they were considered to possess powerful energy or spirit which would be difficult for them to withstand.

Meanwhile, other names also exist distinct from Islamic names. In the past, due to the high rate of child mortality, names were associated with keeping children alive and making them healthy, well, and strong; therefore, names had some sort of protective qualities. By giving protective names, such as Bolta (axes), Teshaboi (hatchet), and Tosh (stone), people wanted to protect their children from evil spirits. In some cases, they wanted to transfer the item's qualities to their children by giving names such

as Chintemir (real iron), Chinpulad (real steel), Tashtemir (stone iron), and Chuyan (cast iron). More meaningful names like Tursun (to stay or to remain), Tuhtasin (to stop), Tuhtagul (stop God's servant), Umurzok (a long life), and Jonibek (strong soul) were associated with families who wished for their children to be healthy and to have long lives. Like the Kyrgyz, the Uzbeks also prefer to have more sons than daughters in their families. For instance, if an Uzbek family has three daughters, they may start naming subsequent daughters Uguloi (son), Yangil (a mistake), Umida (hope), and Adash (lost). Some families would name their children in honor of God if, after several daughters, they get a son. These names included Egamberdi (Gift of Master), Kudaiberdi (Gift of God), Hudanazar (God's sight/attention), Hudaishukur (Thanks to God), Hairulla (God's blessings), Tangriberdi (God's gift), and Abdulla (God's servant).

Should a family welcome a child into the world after a long wait, they may name the child to reflect happiness and thankfulness, such as Nazir (in Arabic "supervision") and Niyoz (in Arabic "gift or reward"). The Uzbeks often name their daughters by associating them with flowers: Gulnora (the flower of pomegranate), Gulbodom (flower of almond), Lola (tulip), Gulchehra (flower face), Atirgul (rose), Gulzar (the place where only flowers grow), Gulbahor (spring flower), Gulniso (flower woman), and Gulsanam (beautiful flower). If the child's father passes away before the child's birth, the name Yodgor for boys and Nuska for girls may be given. If the child is born without married parents, the name Bobokul for boys and Momogul for girls may be given. If a child is born premature, names such as Aitula, Tulkin, and Kamol may be used. The meanings behind these names are to stress their fullness and matureness in order to wish their children to become strong, healthy, and happy.

The names related to animals signify a strong symbiosis between animals and human beings: Kuchkor (sheep), Lochin (falcon), Arslon (lion), Buriboi (wolf), Burgut (eagle), Itboi (dog), and Kaldyrgoch (swallow). By giving animal-associated names, parents hope that the strength and power of the related animal would transfer to their child. Some would give animal-related names to children if they are considered as having special qualities upon birth, such as teeth, in which case the name Buribai (wolf) may be given. This kind of innate sign is not specific to animals, as plants are too believed to have special qualities that can transfer to children. If a girl has a red spot on her body, parents may name the child Anorhon (pomegranate). The idea behind this is that by repeating the name Anorhon people hope that the red spot would eventually disappear. For the same reason, if a child is born with a sixth finger on one hand, the Uzbeks may name them Oltinboi (golden), Oltinoi (golden), or Ortik (exceptional). If the child has a birth mark, traditionally the child would be named Holdarboi, Holidahon, Holmurod, and Holis.

While talking about naming rituals, the names for twins (*egizaklar*) are crucial to mention here as well. Traditionally, the Uzbeks would name twin sons Hasan-Husan, twin girls Fotima-Zuhra, and for mixed twins Tohir-Zuhra. These names were given even if previous siblings were already called these names. This was because if these names were not given, some believed that the mother might not give birth to another

child in the future. Over time, these practices have changed and adopted new meanings. The above-mentioned names were given to newborn children on a regular basis, but now twins' names should be rhythmic, for example: Bahtiyor-Ihtiyor, Ergesh-Tirkesh, or Muhammad-Ibrahim.

Since the birth of twins is a rare occasion, there is associated with it a special belief. The Uzbeks explain the birth of twins in different ways, but the most common one is that the twins' father probably stepped over a pastry board or the mother had probably stepped over a rolling-pin; and as a result of their activities, twins were born. It is believed that twins' mothers possess special qualities and are thus treated differently, with high esteem and respect. For instance, she is considered as having the power to cure sick people. But lately this belief has become less common. However, other curing qualities have remained, such as a person with a sore throat who is often advised to be lightly kicked by the mother of twins three times, so that their illness would disappear. Alternatively, the mother of twins is said to be able to cure a person with back problems by poking with a fire place poker.

To sum up, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have different traditions and rituals, related to the birth of a child, those before and after the birth, and subsequently throughout the child's growth. These rituals are performed with the intention of delivering a child safely and soundly. Another reason for such rituals is to protect the child from a variety of illnesses and dangers surrounding them throughout their childhood. Through this folklore and these practices, the intention is to provide children with care, in the hope of having a healthy and long life. Meanwhile, mothers with several children are treated with honor and esteem; the mother of twins is considered a sacred person with special skills and qualities. In sum, both ethnic groups value children and view them as their most cherished, and their wealth, happiness, pleasure and values are of the utmost importance.

Tradition of *Tushoo Kesüü*

Among Kyrgyz

Parents are usually anxious about child's development, and when the baby's takes first steps this eases their fears about potential health problems or defects and assures them that their offspring will be fine. To help their child take the first steps, some parents put their palm on the ground and let the child to step on it. As the child begins to hold his/her body straight, they help him to stand on his/her own and then make few steps. In the past, people tried to infer the child's future in way the first step was taken. If the child lifted the right leg, it was a good sign, but if it was the left leg, it was an unlucky sign. Sometimes, to speed up the child's walking, the parents poured warm blood of a newly slaughtered sheep into a basin and washed the child in it reaching up his waist line. For the same purpose, they placed the child on a large round clay plate used for covering the rice pilaf. Also, to make the child's legs fully fit into the joints, they pressed the warm kidneys of a newly slaughtered sheep on the child's inner thighs.



*A toddler stands with her legs tied together with a black and white cord.
(Photo by E. Köchümkulova).*

As the child begins to make a few steps, a special ritual of the cutting of cords is performed, *tushoo kesüü*. The child's parents offer a feast by slaughtering a sheep and inviting close relatives, friends, and neighbors to celebrate this happy occasion. The toddler's legs are tied with a black and white cord. Small and teenage children compete in racing and the one who comes to the finish line first gets to cut the cord around the toddler's legs and receive the main prize. The winner also takes the specially prepared new knife to cut the cord. Those children who come in the second and third places also receive gifts. The toddler is then walked by these children, while the elderly people give their blessings wishing the toddler good fortune and strong health. When the child grows up and is successful, people will often, referring to the tradition of *tushoo kesüü* remark "His/her cord is cut now" or "He had cut his cord" referring to the person who had given support to the successful person.

Our ancestors believed that each human body part and movement has its master or protective spirit and that power holds the toddler back from walking. And only by freeing his/her legs by cutting through that power, the toddler can walk freely and faster. It was believed that a toddler would keep tumbling and falling if the cord has not been cut. Even today, if a child keeps falling, people often ask the parents: "Haven't you cut his/her cord?" If a toddler did not walk until the age of three, they tied his/her legs with a rope which is used for tying a lamb seven times and cut it. The black and white cord has its meaning. In the past, when the majority of Kyrgyz raised livestock in the mountains, their main tool for tying their horses, sheep, camels and cows was a rope. They made the cords and ropes from a mixture of wool, because they raised



*Young boys racing to cut the cord of the toddler.
(Photo by E. Köchümkulova).*

sheep of different colors, mainly black and white. Therefore, people used black and white cord for the ritual of *tushoo kesüü*. They used the ropes for various purposes including tying the cow, horse, making *kögön* for tying the lambs and *jele* for tying the foals to prevent them from suckling their mothers' udder. Also, when moving from one pasture to another, people used ropes for loading their belongings onto horses and camels. In other words, ropes were used in everything that needed to be secured. In the past, the Kyrgyz considered the rope used for tying their animals sacred and it was a bad omen to step over it. Finally, the life of a human being is accompanied with good and bad events. The white and black color rope symbolizes the potential struggle between two principles – evil and good and the child's stepping into the life consisting of good and evil.



*The winner cutting the cord.
(Photo by E. Köchümkulova).*

Among Uzbeks

Like many other Turkic-speaking peoples, Uzbeks practiced the tradition of *tushoo kesüü*. Their *tushoo kesüü* was not that different from that of the Kyrgyz, but they celebrated it without spending much expense. Parents of the toddler did not slaughter a sheep, but simply prepared rice pilaf and invited close relatives and neighbors. Children from the neighborhood participated in the race and the winner cut the string tied to the legs of the toddler. While the winner was given a special prize, the rest received candies, dried fruits and coins. The toddler's maternal grandparents also brought gifts of clothes and toys.

Our Uzbek respondents regretted that, due to the strong revival of Islam after independence, the religious clergy have discouraged such practices by saying that this practice does not exist in Islam and does not suit the Islamic *shariah*, and therefore, people have stopped practicing this ritual for the last twenty years.



CHAPTER 3

SPECIAL MEASURES FOR THE CHILD'S GROWTH AND UPBRINGING

The Health and Well-Being of the Child

Among Kyrgyz

The Kyrgyz say that a child can catch a cold from the shadows of the birds in the sky. Due to a child's vulnerability, there are a lot of rituals related to strengthening children's health. For example, in order to make a child's neck strong, a number of special measures take place. Here, a child is lifted up, with their neck rotated to show the child's tenderness and lack of strength. By following a number of rituals, the Kyrgyz believe they are strengthening the health of their children. They may slaughter a sheep and take 40 small pieces of meat and hang them all on the door of, or somewhere inside, a child's bedroom. When the raw meat becomes dry, it is believed that the child's neck becomes strong (*moinu katyit*). The Kyrgyz view the process of drying meat as one which takes the same amount of time as a child's neck becoming strong. There is another widely held belief whereby the heads of seven chickens are picked up and hung in the fireplace of a chimney. In most cases, the sheep's neck is cooked and given to the child's mother to eat, while the remaining bones should be hung on the child's cradle. One can see the presence of animals' necks in folklore; consequently, it is hoped that through various rituals the animal's strong neck would contribute to that of the child.

When a child is sick and is vomiting, their mother's hair is put into the mouth of the child so that the child is tickled by the hair, so that the illness can be overcome. Should the child's vomiting persist, the mother is supposed to dry the child's wet clothes by hanging them collar down, in the belief that the vomiting would finally end. Another ritual involves putting bread into water or cleaning a child's mouth with their elder brother's clean socks or clothes. These practices are hoped to end a child's vomiting.

One of the most prevalent diseases in childhood is called *barpy*. Here, the shape of the child's skull is deformed, and a seam emerges. This process involves the child losing a lot of their hair. As such, several rituals can be performed in order to heal the seam. For instance, sometimes the center of bread is cut with a knife and the ring put on the child's head. In addition, the child may be asked to cross the branches of fruit trees (apricots, apples). Another belief is to add a blue bead when making dough, make a circle out of it and let the child go through it. Some believe that if a person who has been on a ship cuts the child's hair, the child's hair will start growing.



*A seam emerging on the back side on a child's head.
(Photo by E. Köchümkulova).*

Sometimes hair might start falling from the back side and move to the front of a child's head.

Here, it is recommended to prevent wearing hair over the ears, as some people believe that this will cause their eyes to slant. In order to remedy this illness, people follow several rituals, such as destroying the egg of a turtle and stroking the inside of the egg on the child's head. Others collect seven different fabrics and sew a cap that hides the child's head. Many believe that by bringing the child to an intersection of a road and allowing the child to tumble, it will provide a cure. Although this belief is not related to *barpy*, some families still take the child's cap or helmet and make a donkey smell it.

Newborn babies have a soft spot on their head (*emgek*) which is called fontanelle. As mentioned earlier, the Kyrgyz link the soul of a human being with their hair. The fontanelle is very sensitive area and it pulses in time with the baby's heartbeat. Until a child starts walking, this part of the body is carefully protected by their parents. Togolok Moldo, a famous poet and writer, wrote a legendary and popular tale about 'Naughty Telibai'. In this tale, he described how a boy killed his sister's child by touching the child's head's fontanelle. According to folklore, one should not touch a newborn's head until the child can pronounce the word for stone (*tash*).

In bringing up children, coercion is strictly prohibited. It is believed that by engaging in such practices the child might get sick. In Kyrgyz language it is called *jürögü tüshtü* meaning that a child is scared, intimidated, and frightened. The scared child may start vomiting and experience strong headaches, which are all indications that the child is afraid of something. Someone qualified must open the child's mouth and put inside their finger and lift the palate by saying: '*ap-ap-ap*'. They may also take a small silver hammer and hit gently on different body parts, saying three times: 'it is not my hands, but the hands of *Umai ene*'. By doing this, it is believed that the child's health will be restored.

Typically, after this the child is given a lot of water to drink. If the child gets sick, the child is asked to sit down in a bowl full of sheep's blood. Another ritual is that the child is lifted up by their feet up to the top of the door and told: 'hold on, heart'. Another belief is that if a tortoiseshell marble (shield) is used as a dish for washing

oneself five times, then the child will have a speedy recovery. This is because turtles appear strong and unafraid, with a strong shell which protects them from external threats. As a result, the Kyrgyz symbolically associate turtles with protection.

If sickness is not treated on time, this might lead to a child experiencing weight loss. In Kyrgyz language, the term thin (*aryk*) is similar to the Kyrgyz word for ghost (*arbak*). The Kyrgyz view very thin people as if they are dying. The ritual is performed in the following way: a child is brought to a sacred place and a small cup of porridge is prepared in advance for the tomb's guardian spirits. The child's clothes are removed and then covered on the grave three times and said several times: 'Ghosts reside in cemeteries. The living and cemetery do not fit well with one another'. The prepared porridge is then left near the cemetery for the spirits. Afterwards, the child will start to feel better, their health will improve and their confidence will increase.

The term thin is spelled and pronounced in the same way as the term ditch. Therefore, another ritual is practiced when a child is too thin; they are put in a dry ditch and rolled back and forth. This ritual is practiced every morning for three days. Some slaughter a fat goat and soup is given to the child. After sipping hot soup, cold water is immediately given to the child, so that the goat's fat would be soaked and adhered to the child's intestines. After this practice, the child is expected to gain some weight.

According to folklore, men would be sentenced to death by order of a khan. A person who was sentenced would be given a chance to say his last words and speak of his regrets before he died; often his main regret was that he would not hear his child's first words. This folklore highlights the importance of a child's first words as being crucial among the Kyrgyz for the child's early development. Consequently, the importance of speaking properly is accompanied with a set of rules and superstitions.

For example, children are not allowed to drink rain water or to look at themselves in the mirror; otherwise, the child might not speak properly in the future. Moreover, in order to prevent a child from having speech impediments, the child is not allowed to suck their thumb or gnaw at a bone. Some believe that certain foods contribute to a child's language development, especially the leftovers of baked bread, milk and tea. More specifically, if leftover bread is taken from a shepherd (cattle), prophetic elders or dervishes, the child's language will become more accurate. There is a link between remnants of bread and a prophetic elder or dervish because these poor people did not have a lot of bread. As such, all they could offer was the leftovers of bread in their bags. No one knows the reason why leftover food may contribute to a child's language development. One can, however, make an assumed link between leftovers and saliva. When people finish eating their food or drinking their tea, only saliva remains. The parents hope for their children to acquire good oral skills by eating and drinking the leftovers of adults. The saliva of those who ate or drank would transfer to the child and contribute to their speaking skills. While eating around the table, family members hotly discuss issues and exchange ideas and thoughts. Usually during these talks, very tiny droplets of *saliva* come out of their mouths. Therefore, the Kyrgyz link saliva with

speaking and exchanging ideas. In Kyrgyz language, there are expressions associated with saliva and these relate to speaking properly and beautifully: 'spitting saliva' (*shilekeidi chachyratuu*) or 'spitting one's golden saliva' (*altyn shilekeidi chachyratuu*).

Sometimes, when children start feeling bad and crying without showing any signs of being sick, this is called '*kirine kiriptir*', meaning that the evil spirit has entered the child's body. Constant yawning of a child is the main sign of the problem. On occasion, a piece from the clothes or sole of person who has stared at the child would be circulated around a burning juniper branch. A child may feel bad and weak when someone praises them or shows affection. In this case, the child's mother or grandmother would take the child to a healer, who would take a piece of bread (some use paper or knife) and stroke these items on the child's body from top to bottom, while saying these words:

Get out sickness inside, get out sickness inside
Instead go to the flow water
Go to the high mountains
Go to a person with bad thoughts
Go to a person with bad intentions
Go out evil spirit inside, go out!

Get out sickness inside, get out evil spirit inside
Go to the old ruins (the remains of ancient settlements)
Go to the empty houses
Do not touch my child
Go out evil spirit inside, go out, and go out!

Go to the dog outside
Go to the big belly rich
Go to the unknown places
Do not touch my child
Go out evil spirit, go out, go out!

Once the mother finishes saying several times *chyk kirine chyk, chyk* 'Get out the sickness inside, go out the evil spirit inside', she would spit saying '*tüü, tüü*' before quickly standing up from where she was. Many try and rid the child's sickness by putting bread on the child's body before giving the bread to a dog to eat. It is important not to see the dog before the bread has been eaten; otherwise it is believed that the sickness would follow that person. If paper is used to rid the child of sickness, the paper is supposed to be burnt immediately. If this ritual is performed by someone else, the child's mother should pay for this service.

It is believed that some parts of animals are useful for helping a child to recover from diseases and sadness. When a child suffers from a cough, a pregnant mountain goat may be shot and slaughtered. An unborn goat's gallbladder is given to consume.

Similarly, a grey donkey's milk is believed to have some medical qualities. Some would drink water from a crow's wing after thoroughly washing it. Folklore holds that if a child keeps suffering from coughing and additional discomforts, others are supposed to call the child by the name 'ram' (Kochkorbay), and afterwards the child's sickness would disappear.

Some practice another method of curing children with rickets (*itij*). Some would use an eagle's gallbladder for children with epilepsy and wolf's gallbladder for children with rickets, in the belief that they have curing qualities that help children to overcome sickness. Some parents may wrap a sick child in a headscarf and put the child on a deceased dog, before quickly removing the child's clothes and carrying the naked child home. At home, the child is given new clothes and their face greased with butter. The child's oily face is licked by a small clean puppy. It is believed that the sickness then leaves along with the deceased dog, and that life starts again from the beginning.

Some illnesses are believed to have their master spirits (*eesi*). If a child has an ear infection, this may be because he/she contaminated spring water accidentally; therefore, the master spirit of the spring water was in a sense speaking of its dirtiness through the child's ear infection. In order to beg for forgiveness and to gain blessings, a child's mother together with her female friends may prepare seven pieces of fried round bread (*jeti tokoch*) and go to the water spring. Additionally, they may also burn juniper and wish for the child to have good health. Once the women finish eating bread, the mother would throw beads into the water and wash the child's ears three times while saying: 'please take your spring water back and bring my child's ears'. Once this process is over, the women were supposed to get up and go home quickly without looking back; otherwise, it is believed that the sickness would follow them. Hence, the child's ear infection is called *bulak* in Kyrgyz, which means spring water.

Another sickness is *kызамык*, which is the Kyrgyz word for measles. This is a highly contagious infection caused by the measles virus. When a child has measles, a red curtain is hung up. During this infection, it is prohibited to wash clothes and bring raw meat to the household. People avoid using the exact term for measles out loud but would prefer to say that 'flowers have bloomed'. Children would be given the drink *bozo*, which is made from boiled and fermented millet grains, and contains a small percent of alcohol. It is said that if a person does not contract measles during their lifetime, then they will get it once they pass away.

Sometimes, children can be burnt from fire, hot water or boiled milk. These types of accidents are called *küiük*, which are as painful for parents as they are for children. Mother's milk is considered sacred, and children, when they grow up, are expected to pay back by showing deep respect and care for their mothers. When a child is burnt, their mother would say that the child will not owe any debts in their lifetime towards her. She would say 'I do not need to get any milk's payment'. Going through the burning experience is like dying and coming back to life; thus, the child is not given any clothes, which have been burnt. Such prohibition is not only related

to children but also to adults. If they wear burnt clothes, this implies that they may experience being burnt in the future.

Among Uzbeks

Uzbek parents take a number of measures to raise their children healthily. If the child is constantly crying while sleeping in the cradle, it is assumed that the small hair on the child's back was pricking their back. Under such circumstances, an old wool carpet is beaten and the dust is smeared on the child's back. Accordingly, the hair on the child's body falls out. If the child is born with hair on their body, some people have been known to stroke clay on the child's body. It was normal in some cases for a child's body to be covered with hair and people thought that certain rituals would remove the hair.

Another illness is where the child's hair would fall out from bottom to top. The Uzbeks associated this process with roads or routes, because of the apparently similar features. As mentioned above, the Kyrgyz called this sickness *barpy*. Interestingly, the Uzbeks treat this sickness in similar way to the Kyrgyz. Among Uzbeks, any person who used to travel on ships or boats is asked to cut the child's hair. If it is not possible to find such a person, a turtle's eggs or a wolf's gallbladder is presented. Usually, children had one curl on the top of their hair, but some children had two curls. In such situations, it was believed that the child might get two wives. In order to prevent this from happening, parents would give one object of household utensils such as a wooden rim to someone in their community.

When a child has an ear infection, the mother's milk is dropped into the child's ear. Sometimes, if the child suffers pain in their back, as a remedy the mother's elder brother (*toga*) may give sheep as a gift, burn his old clothes and stroke the back of the child's ear with its ash. If the child is sick from evil eyes, seven pieces of bread are given to a dog. In order to avoid several freckles appearing on the child's face, it is prohibited to count the stars in the sky. It is not permitted to beat a child with baking gloves as it is believed the child might not grow up otherwise. A child is not allowed to sit on the parents' heads as otherwise the child might suffer from headaches. If a child gets constantly sick, the pieces of seven types of fabrics are burnt and the smoke of the burnt fabrics is fumigated. Additionally, the child is given hot soup in order to become strong and healthy.

To begin with, the child is given only the mother's milk, but once the child has teeth they receive additional food. Therefore, the growth of teeth is carefully observed. If teeth are not growing as expected, a spoon is licked three times by the child. By licking the spoon, people hope that the teeth will grow quickly. Some follow the practice of putting 32 pieces of rice into water to represent human teeth, thereby wishing for 32 healthy teeth. Rice has some symbolic meanings and is sometimes spread on the child's head, as this is believed to be an effective way of straightening one's teeth. Some give rice porridge to children in order to improve their teeth. Since teeth are

seen as a sign of beauty, the child is asked to ride a sheep because of its straight teeth. In order to avoid growing big and ugly teeth, it is advised not to ride a donkey or cow. Some mothers throw their children's first tooth on the roof, in the hope that they will give birth to a boy. Others throw away broken teeth in order to prevent having additional unnecessary teeth.

In order for a child's speech to develop well, water which is used for rinsing out the leftover food is given to drink. The parents give leftover tea to the child and it is believed that the child who drinks leftovers will have good oratorical skills. This belief is similar to that of the Kyrgyz, who also practice this notion. After eating food, the child, however, is not allowed to wipe his mouth with the tablecloth, as it is believed that no one will listen to them in the future if they do. Moreover, this kind of child might turn out to be a liar.

The child's first steps are an important event for parents, partially because they represent good development and partly because they mean less work for the parents. Therefore, a number of measures are taken in order to make this process fast and less painful. The child is put on a big plate, which is usually used for covering the cauldron for steaming rice pilaf or bathed in the blood of a newly slaughtered sheep. When the child makes their first steps, parents throw candies at the child's head. If the small child looks at their feet while crawling, this implies that the child wants to have a younger brother. If indeed a younger brother is born, a cooked egg is prepared and tied to the newborn child and shown to the elder brother as a gift. It is believed that the elder sister or brother would not be jealous of the second child. The newborn child's face should not be shown to bigger brothers or sisters at the beginning when the child first arrives in the house. Instead, their feet are shown to them in order to avoid jealousy.

Another important event during a boy's childhood is circumcision. The Uzbeks call circumcision *hatna*. After circumcision boys are allowed to slaughter a sheep or a rooster. Circumcision is considered a process of purification according to Islam, although the practice dates back long before Islam. According to some sources, the ancient Egyptians practiced circumcision. It represents the shift from one stage of a boy's development to the next. There are different reasons behind the ritual, but the most commonly agreed upon is cleanliness. It is essential for every person before praying to be clean, especially in the heat. Thus, by removing the foreskin of the penis it is easier to keep it clean and to avoid infection.

In the village of Ak-Tam in Ala-Buka region, elder Mansur Usmanov provided his understanding of the importance of circumcision. While being born, the child's penis might touch the vagina of his mother, thereby making him sinful. Therefore, it was important to remove the foreskin of the penis. This is an interesting interpretation, though not one commonly shared.

Usually, boys are circumcised when they reach an odd-numbered age such as three, five or seven. The person who performs the circumcisions is called a master (*usta*) and he should have his own sons. While a boy is being circumcised, the mother

is not allowed to watch the process, and instead she waits outside, putting her small finger into flour. In the past, several boys would be circumcised together and a huge feast would be arranged for them. Their parents would invite a lot of people and provide food and drinks for guests. The feast was organized on the same day as the circumcision or a few days after it. During these feasts, the hosts would lose forks, knives, or spoons because the guests would steal them wishing that they would also celebrate happy family events in the future. The hosts were aware of this ritual, but they were just happy that people came and gave their blessings. Some families preferred their sons to be circumcised immediately after birth. In such cases, names like Sunnat (the way of the Prophet) or Sunnatullo (The Immutable Constants of Allah's System) were given.

Prohibitions Related to Children

Among Kyrgyz

To raise a person who can be accepted by family and community alike, important measures are taken from early childhood. Numerous rules, regulations, beliefs, and prohibitions exist related to the child's behavior. Some prohibitions contradict one another. Through different prohibitions, parents believe that they will prevent in advance the bad behavior of their children, allowing parents to be proud of their children. For parents, it is important to pay close attention to their children's behavior by controlling and explaining how they should behave among families as well as in communities. One of the best strategies is to tell a child that something bad will happen if they persist with their undesired behavior. This can be enough to stop a child from doing bad things, because they are afraid of bad things happening to them.

According to the Kazakh poet and writer Mukhtar Shahanov, in the past, the Kazakhs had more than 200 prohibitions, including the following: one could not spit water where one drank; one could not throw away bread or trample down bread; one could not trample down salt; one could not interrupt elderly people; one could not say bad things to parents and could not discuss or argue with them; one could not make fun of a disabled person; one could not stare at another person; one could not beat a sheep's head; one could not rock an empty cradle; one could not whistle at home; one could not throw away a hat; one could not destroy an anthill or a bird's nest.²⁶ These and other prohibitions existed in Kyrgyz culture as well and were also well integrated into literature, language, culture, and beliefs. These prohibitions served as an ethnic or national ideology for the people, and thus have been preserved. These prohibitions could be described as ethnopedagogy. These have not been investigated by scholars in depth, but hopefully this book fills a gap in the literature.

As mentioned above, the rationale behind these prohibitions was to educate children, so that children would seriously accept what their elders would tell them

²⁶ Aitmatov Ch., Shahanov M. *Plach' ohotnika nad propast'yu (Ispoved' na ishode veka)*. Almaty: Rauan, 1996, p. 144.

and so they would know their actions would have consequences. For example, it was not permitted to eat food with the knife's tip, otherwise the person would become angry, unkind and impish. The Kyrgyz do not value aggressive and angry persons and believe that the anger of such people is located on their noses' tips. It was therefore prohibited to give a knife as a gift to a friend, as it was thought that a friend might turn into an enemy in this case. If a person still gave a knife as a gift, the receiving side was supposed to give some money in return to change the nature of the conveyance of the knife from a gift to a transaction. If the knife was left on the edge of a table, bad events were expected to happen, including bleeding or death of an animal.

Kyrgyz ancestors believed the knife had strong qualities, and that if the knife could not cut one thing, it could still at least wound another thing. The knife's power could sever the blessings of people; therefore, the knife was taken away from the table during prayer. According to folklore, the knife naturally wanted to cut everything on a table and would cry when removed. A similar prohibition was in place for guns. It was not permitted to step over a gun and look down the barrel of a gun as it was believed to have its own power and could fire even in the absence of a person. By adhering to these prohibitions, people taught their children not to play with knives and guns.

Another interesting prohibition related to whistling. If a child whistled in the evening, the child was told that a thief might come to the house and take everything. Usually, the Kyrgyz do not like to whistle. If they see a child whistling, the whistling child is viewed as an uneducated young person without proper knowledge and education. If a child whistled at home, he might be told 'may your teeth be destroyed by stones.' This dislike of whistling could be linked to the patron of wind Aidar, who was invited by whistling to clean grain. In some cases, too much wind would bring more harm, such as storms. Therefore, whistling represented wind and children who whistled were cursed accordingly.

Another prohibition related to the sun and moon. It was not permitted to urinate while looking at the sun or moon. Moreover, it was prohibited to stare at the moon, because the moon was seen as a sacred phenomenon. Instead, one was supposed pray when looking at the moon. Children were not supposed to count the stars, but if they did, they certainly could not count more than 40. It was believed that numbers above 40 were equal to death. It was also not permitted for children to spit in the air as it would mean showing disrespect to nature and also spitting on one's own face.

Other prohibitions related to the child's future and several measures were taken in this regard. It was not permitted to measure the height of the child, to go under a rope or to step over the child's feet. Otherwise, it was believed, the child might not grow up. During wartime, the Kyrgyz valued tall children. Therefore, they would follow all kinds of prohibitions related to a child's height. Tall soldiers were valuable when fighting against enemies. Aside from times of war, the Kyrgyz valued smart children. Therefore, the intellect of a person was accepted rather than his or her physical qualities. If a child was too tall, the mother would place bread three times on the child's head, hoping that the growing process would stop.

It was not permitted to put *usma* on a boy's eyebrows, as this might make him unhappy and unlucky. If small girls put *usma* on a boy's eyebrow without knowing the consequences, the mother put the boy's head into a clay oven three times. In order to protect the child's health, it was not permitted to put any rope on the child's neck. In the past, if a person killed another person, he could go to the family of the deceased with the rope around his neck which implies that he is ready to be punished for his crime and they can suffocate him with the rope. It was believed that if someone wrapped the rope around someone's neck it was implied that the rope had the power to take him to another world. Therefore, it was prohibited to play with rope.

In order to prevent a child from suffering poverty, a child was not allowed to sleep before noon. The boy was not allowed to sit on the stacked sit-on mats and blankets as it would mean that his wife might come without a dowry in the future. A dowry was seen as being convenient, therefore boys avoided doing such things. Having wealthy parents-in-law was considered positive, therefore boys tried to follow the rules in order to marry girls with wealthy and economically stable families.

The core of raising a moral child was teaching to respect, honor, and value other human beings. For this purpose, it was prohibited to step over another person's body. If someone was sitting around the table, he or she was not supposed to go outside by walking in front of people but was instead expected to go behind them. Bouts of wrestling were usually organized during feasts. Wrestlers would be enraged if one of them stepped over another's head. The human head was valued, so the pillow was not supposed to be trampled down. If a child was sitting on a pillow, he or she was threatened with a blow on the back. Additionally, it was prohibited to count people using fingers. Stretching in front of people was also viewed as negative and inappropriate, as the person's bad qualities could come out from inside and be transferred to another person.

There were several prohibitions designed to educate children. These included the following: it was essential to greet the other person before a conversation could begin; not saying hurtful or swear words; not interrupting when two other persons were talking; not interrupting elderly people; not shaking water off the hands after washing them; while attending a funeral it was not permitted to ask about the health of a sick person; not slamming the door; not putting your feet on the tablecloth; not leaving the table without getting permission; not walking in front of a praying person; and not laughing at disabled people. If children forgot to follow any of these, they were constantly reminded of them until they became an integral part of their behavior and practice. Only by following these rules were children considered to be well brought up and their parents were praised accordingly. Indeed, the community would encourage the following of these rules by praising, complementing and glorifying children who did so.

One of the most important rules to follow was not to circle around a person, as such behavior could bring misfortune and trouble. When this rule was breached, mothers usually poured water in a cup and circled around the head of the person who had been circled around, so water could take away all misfortunes and troubles. Thus,

children were banned from circling around a person or a house, believing that evil spirits came and brought misfortune.

Another important aspect when raising a child was prohibiting children from beating their mother's brother (*taga/taiake*). This was considered as sinful behavior. Any such offender would end up being sick and useless. A man was considered to have three kinds of relatives: own relatives (from father's side), mother's relatives, and wife's relatives. Respecting a mother's relatives was deemed the same as respecting the mother herself. In return, the mother's brother or other relatives would respect their *jeen*, sister's son. A sister's children were especially highly valued among maternal relatives. They were not allowed to sit on bare floor, if they did so, their maternal brother would become poor. A sister's children could ask for anything that they wanted from their mother's relatives. Indeed, there was a humorous saying that it was better for seven wolves to come to your home rather than seven sister's children (*Jeen kelgenche jeti börü kelsin*).

In the first comprehensive dictionary of Turkic languages, the *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* written in the 11th century by Mahmud ibn Hussayn ibn Muhammed al-Kashgari, the word 'daughter' meant a female or young female.²⁷ Moreover, they were considered valuable and expensive.

Daughters would leave the house of parents soon, once they got older, to their future husband's. An uneducated daughter would shame not only her parents, but also her own offspring and community. Therefore, parents tried to carefully educate their daughters according to the local rules, expectations, and prohibitions. However, at the same time, community members would assist families to raise their daughters collectively. There are some proverbs highlighting this notion: "the girl should be brought up by forty households" (*Kyzga kyrk jerden tyiu*); or "if you have a daughter, you should be attentive" (*Kyzduu bolsong közdüü bol*). Thus, daughters were given household responsibilities and tasks at home, as parents prepared their daughters for their own families in the future. Preparations are made in various ways. Firstly, it is important that daughters are woken up early in the morning and start cleaning the yard. This is encouraged by saying that happiness comes only in the morning. A popular saying states: "Not a strand of hair should lie in the house which has a daughter" (*Kyzduu üydö kyl jatpait*). The house is not supposed to be dirty, and this is a female's task to keep the house clean and tidy. In the evening, a girl should finish all household tasks and have some rest. It is believed that if the house is dirty, then the *shaitan*, evil spirit, might come in the evening.

Secondly, another responsibility of a daughter is to clean dishes. It is not permitted for dishes to be put into a *kazan* (boiler), as it is said that this might bring some conflict in the home since the dishes would touch each other thereby creating some sounds that resemble people fighting. In such a boiler, dishes can be broken. It is

²⁷ Mahmud Kashgari. *Divan Lugat at-Turk*. Translated with foreword and comments by Z.-A. M. Auezov, Almaty: Daik-Press, 2005, p. 319.

not acceptable to drink tea or eat food from broken dishes, because this implied that happiness would diminish. Such broken dishes are supposed to be thrown away, and instead new dishes are to be brought in the hope that new people and good news come to the house. There are rules regarding how daughters are supposed to clean dishes, carefully handling each one of them. It is not permitted to make loud noises while washing dishes or to leave dishes unwashed overnight. Clean dishes represented a blessing of the next day's food and, thus, the whole day. If the dishes are not washed, people believe that the dishes could not have travelled to Mecca to get their blessing and had been left at home due to shame. Through these stories and rules, parents encourage their daughters to clean the house and wash the dishes punctually. They send the message indirectly through revealing consequences and telling stories of what might happen if they do not act according to the existing rules.

Finally, daughters are also responsible for taking care of domestic animals. If daughters feed their dogs, it means that they get a blessing from their dogs. Their dogs give them happiness and luck. But if a tablecloth is cleaned by boys instead of girls, it was believed that luck and happiness might evade the family. Daughters are also responsible for cooking; therefore, some rules and regulations regarding fire are to be followed. It is not permitted for daughters to hit the fire, to put water or any dirty things on the fire, or to spit on the fire, as otherwise her happiness might disappear.

Any leftovers are not to be thrown into the fire. If the burning wood gave such loud noises, a few drops of oil were splashed on them. The ashes of a fire are treated carefully. It is not permitted to step over the ashes, and no one is allowed to urinate on the ashes, as this is believed to make the ashes sick or angry. The ashes and other dirt from the house are not to be swept together with a broom, as this is believed to cause death and feast on the same day. When a young couple gets married, ashes are not allowed to be taken away, since the ashes signify the happiness of the young couple. All items related to making a fire are treated carefully and not stepped over by any means. The fire is not to be dug into with the sharp ends of iron; instead the iron is supposed to be curved or rounded. All of these prohibitions reflect the sacredness of the fire.

Daughters are not allowed to wear black clothes and let their hair loose, as this kind of appearance is deemed apt only for funerals. Daughters are not allowed to put their arms on their knees, because this implies poverty or orphanhood. Girls are prohibited from crossing their feet, lying down on their back in front of many people, and opening their feet. A daughter is not supposed to sit with her legs crossed, as this is interpreted as her being the head of the family. It is also believed that the delivery of her first child might be difficult. Girls are asked not to wear boy's clothes or the clothes of brothers' wives. Girls are not allowed to kick boys or step over them and their clothes.

When a girl picks her eyebrows before marriage, this means any kind of food given by her to her father will be *haram*, not pure. And if she does not pick her eyebrows after marriage, any food given by her to her husband will be *haram*. The eyebrows are linked to the lives of one's parents. When girls put *usma* on their eyebrows, they

should connect the middle of their eyebrows to wish a long life for their parents. Cutting one's own hair is not allowed, because this is equal to cutting one's own life. Hair is not shown in the dark to others, nor should it be brushed in the evening. A girl is not supposed to see herself in the evening in a broken mirror, as this could lead to her missing out on happiness.

It is not permitted for girls to look into the eyes of men and shake hands with them. Stretching in front of others is not acceptable for girls, and if a girl did it, she might be teased that she wanted to get married. For girls, opening one's mouth is seen as a mark of being uneducated. A girl is not allowed to cross the path of a man as the man's road would be blocked. When men meet girls, it is expected that they do not stare at men but rather aim their eyes toward the earth. The girls were not sent to bring water in the evening. If they went to fetch water in the evening, they should say three times *Bismilla*, throw three black stones into the water and take water. In other words, girls' behavior is carefully observed, especially how they wear clothes, speak to others, make jokes, and laugh. The Kyrgyz explain that this strict control of girls will assist their daughters to grow up educated. Therefore, the role of mothers is enormous when it comes to raising daughters.

Among Uzbeks

As with the Kyrgyz, the Uzbeks value families with a lot of children. This is obvious not only in folklore but is also vivid in their everyday lives and practices. Apparently, during World War II, many Uzbek families adopted children without parents, despite the fact that the adopting families had many children of their own. Thousands of orphans were taken to Uzbek families who raised them as their own children. Various mixed, international families emerged out of such adoption processes. Moreover, the Uzbeks encourage having many children with the promise of blessings from God. In this regard, they have many rituals and beliefs relating to the upbringing of children that are widely used and practiced in their everyday lives.

According to Muslim laws of middle ages, raising children, especially sons, is not an easy task. The child begins to learn that his father is the most important man in his life. In the morning, a boy comes to the father's house, kisses his hand and waits for permission to leave by putting his hands on his chest. It may take a long time for permission to be granted, but the son would not dare to interrupt his father. It is the father's obligation to teach the son to be a proper Muslim. From the age of six, the child is asked to start eating food with his right hand. It is discouraged to eat food very quickly, and instead the son is supposed to be grateful for any kind of food and not to take food from another's plate²⁸.

The father teaches his son not only ethics, but also a particular profession or craft. A desire to learn the profession and/or craft implied positive qualities, to be useful

²⁸ T. I. Iskandarov, V. I. Ishakov. *Zdorovyi obraz zhizni: vostochnye traditsii i sovremennost'*, Tashkent: Meditsina, 1989, p. 68.

throughout life. The lack of a profession or craft is negatively viewed by the community, implying that the boy may not be reliable in the future and may be incapable of feeding his own family. Engaging children in work starts from a very young age. Meanwhile, it is also highly valued among the Uzbeks for girls to learn a craft. Girls are encouraged to touch a bat, in the belief that this will lead to them becoming good tailors and qualified professionals. It is also believed that if an apprentice clothes-maker throws away the first shirt she tailored into the water, this implies that she could be good at sewing.

Parents believe that a child is likely not to follow what their parents tell them to do. Therefore, teaching the child using vivid examples is a good method. It is forbidden to beat a child, and if a young child's head is beaten, it is believed that the first child of the person who beat the child might die. Indeed, adults are not supposed to beat not only a child, but anyone on the face, as it is implied that this would make God angry.

Above all, special attention is given to the moral upbringing and education of girls because they are treated as belonging to someone's family. It is natural for the Uzbeks to say that 40 horses might be tied to a girl's house (*Kizlik uyga kirk ot boilantar*), meaning that many will come asking for the girl's hands and she would have another family and that daughters did not belong to their natal families since childhood. Since a girl's future is seen in the family of her husband, special attention is paid to how she behaves, talks, and deals with people, in order to be proud of her once she gets married and starts her own new life. A girl's mother is responsible for daughter's education and moral upbringing. Thus, there are many prohibitions for girls to adhere to, a selection of which are outlined below.

The prohibitions for girls largely relate to hygiene. Hygiene is a central element of education for girls and an important theme in Uzbek culture. For girls, being clean also means being cultured. In fact, a girl with long hair is considered beautiful. Therefore, girls are supposed to wrap headscarves around their heads before going to sleep. Failure to do so, it is claimed, risks an evil spirit licking their hair while they are sleeping, which would result in the loss of hair. After brushing hair, it is important to collect falling hair; if not there is a risk of finding one such hair in a meal or on clothes, which is not well received by the girl's parents. Hair is not to be thrown into a toilet or burnt. Hair is not even supposed to stay on the comb, as this can lead a girl to have a complicated life. This kind of prohibition is practical, because someone might use the same comb or brush after the girl. It is discouraged for girls to cut their hair short, as this is seen as akin to shortening their lives. If hair is cut, then it is buried under grapevines in the hope that their hair will grow like grapes. Girls are also told that exposing hair to rain might contribute to their hair's growth.

Similar to hair, prohibitions also exist among the Uzbeks with regard to nails. It is prohibited for a girl to have long nails, as doing so means that evil spirits might come to the girl in the night. Moreover, it is banned for nails to be burned, as this could cause deformity. Nails can mean that many will come asking for the girl's hands, however, be left behind a door, as it is believed that they have protective qualities.

Popular religious belief says that the nails left behind the threshold will protect the people on the Judgement Day by growing into a wall. More recently, it has become common for many people to leave nails under grapevines. Nails are not to be cut at another's person's house, as this could mean showing disrespect. One should not cut nails on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, as this might cause some skin diseases such as vitiligo. Scissors are not allowed to be left in a visible place and should be kept away from children. If these rules are not followed, children are told that their parents will fight with one another. As mentioned above, people link hair and nails to health and life as a whole.

From early childhood, girls are asked to help their mothers and to be actively engaged in household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and washing dishes. In order to prevent the arrival of evil spirits, girls are taught to clean the house and wash the dishes before they go to sleep. Moreover, girls are asked not to make any noise while washing dishes, as making noise would lead to close family members arguing or fighting. Washing dishes before going to bed is crucial, and there are several interpretations here. First, girls are told that if they do not wash dishes in the evening then their father's business will suffer. Second, if dishes are left overnight without being washed, the house may become an unhappy place. Meanwhile, if a girl makes a wish while cooking and putting oil into a bowl, it is more likely that the girl's wishes will come true.

Girls are taught not to give milk to neighbors after dark falls, as this causes pain on the cow's udder. When neighbors come and ask for salt or spicy peppers, they should be placed on the ground for the neighbor to pick up. By doing so, it is believed that the two neighbors' relationship will not turn sour or spicy. Salt and spicy peppers are associated with anger, arguing, fighting and unhappiness. Another prohibition is not to eat any kind of fruit or vegetable with a fork instead of a knife, as this may make the person angry and unhappy.

It is also not permitted for girls to sit on a spread-out blanket, and it was claimed that doing so would reduce their dowry. If a girl sits at a respected place (which is on the other side of the table and opposite to the door), this implies that she will get a plentiful dowry from her parents. Having a slender dowry means having a bad relationship with the mother-in-law, but having a rich dowry means having a good relationship with the mother-in-law. With such threats, the Uzbeks educate their children to be tidy, clean, and neat. All kinds of carpets have to be neatly laid out, while pillows are also important and should not be stepped over. The pillow is considered the parents' gift and therefore it should be kept clean and neat.

In general, the Uzbeks do not allow their children to step over a person and/or their head. Usually, girls are asked not to play with pillows and are told that doing so might lead to them developing sores. There is an association between stepping over a person's head and ending someone's marriage. Indeed, stepping over a person's head meant that a wife cheated on her husband. Usually divorce is not well received by Uzbeks, as this brings shame and humiliation to the woman's family and community.

While making a bed, the bed's head should be directed toward the sacred Qibla, in the city of Mecca. This is important in the daily lives of Muslims, as it provides spiritual unity. It is prohibited to sleep with one's feet directed towards Mecca, as this is considered disrespectful. Moreover, children are asked not to step over a sitting person and are told that doing so would lead to the child dying before the person who is sitting. Children are not allowed to lie down with their head in their hands, as this might lead to evil spirits getting into the child's head. Any child playing with fire is told that he or she might urinate during the night. Essentially, playing with fire is banned. This prohibition is connected to security measures and protecting children from playing with fire.

For an Uzbek girl to be happy in her married life, she follows a certain number of prohibitions and superstitions. She does not stitch her own clothes, as she fears that this might bring unhappiness in married life. Girls are not allowed to go between two boys, as it is thought that boys might damage her marital happiness. In order to avoid rainfall on their wedding day, both girls and boys do not eat remnants of food burned on the bottom of a boiler. The Uzbeks try to keep boys away from household tasks, even though they could contribute to cooking. The Uzbeks believe that rain might fall during the wedding of a capricious and stubborn person. It is believed that both a skimmer and ladle is not to be left in the cauldron, or the girl will have an angry mother-in-law. If a girl cuts bread into several pieces, this implies that her mother-in-law will be talkative. If a girl licks an empty plate, this means that she might not have a mother-in-law at all. If she pours tea onto the plate after eating rice pilaf, this implies that the her husband will be handsome. Every action of a girl is controlled and closely supervised by a mother, elder sisters, and other female relatives. All kinds of superstitions exist and continue to be practiced even after the girl is married.

Uzbek girls get up early in the morning and sweep their yard. This is related to the belief that the earth tells a girl that by cleaning its face, God will make her happy. A girl should start the sweeping process by saying there is only one God, Allah, and that Muhammed was his ambassador. Saying this was equal to going around the Kaaba three times. Sweeping is supposed to be accompanied by positive emotions and hoping for a feast or party to come soon. This technique is productive and brings good results, including the voluntary engagement of girls to clean the yard. If two girls sweep the street at the same time means that these girls will become the wives of two brothers. As mentioned earlier, among the Uzbeks, usually several family members live together, including sometimes the wives of several brothers.

The method of sweeping is one-dimensional and doing otherwise is believed to mean that her parents will get divorced. Also, in a practical sense, this method left less dust. The ashes are considered sacred therefore it is not permitted to step over them. It is prohibited to jump over dirty water after washing clothes, as doing so will damage the business. While in the toilet, one is not supposed to pick one's nose or scratch one's ears, as this could cause skin deceases. Overall, these various rules were designed to keep children clean and hygienic.

The Uzbeks treat their men as being more valuable, because they are usually the main breadwinners. A man's business success dictates the financial situation of the household. A man's salary is highly valued compared to women's salaries, even if the latter are high. Therefore, women wash their husbands' clothes first and give their husbands their food first before other family members. Moreover, women are not allowed to step over their husbands' personal belongings.

Most prohibitions for children are related to bread and food. This starts with baking bread. It is important for children to wash their hands after baking bread before starting a new task. If a girl does not follow this rule, it is believed that her future husband will get a second wife. It is prohibited to knead dough twice and to put two big spoons into the bowl with the dough as this could also lead to the future husband getting a second wife. After making the dough, the wife is not supposed to wash her hands in canal water as this means that her happiness might vanish.

An underlay or mat for dough (made of sheep and goatskin), which is called a *supura*, is not to be left empty, and instead a small portion of flour should be in it. Otherwise, it is believed, the child of the mat's owner will suffer, and therefore, a portion of flour should remain. A man's knife is prohibited from being put inside the mat. The mat should be put aside by the same person who has laid it out. If this person could not do it, and instead it was done by someone else, she or he would start lifting the mat by saying "Your owner went to a feast" and after that she or he could take it. Otherwise, the mat would think that its owner has died. If small pieces of bread or dough are spread all over the mat, this means that many guests will come to the home. It is prohibited to lean onto dough wrapped with a blanket, as otherwise the bread will "fall asleep," meaning it will not rise. The dough is not to be wrapped in a man's clothes, as otherwise it is believed that when the man passes away, his stomach might swell. The leaven is not given to anyone; every household should possess its own leaven at home. If the leaven is given, despite the prohibition, this is hidden from others. Otherwise, the dough will not stick to the wall of the clay oven (*tandyr*). If a cat enters the clay oven, the bread dough will not stick to the wall of the oven. In such cases, the juniper is burnt, and the oven is cleansed of the cat's smell. They make sure to always keep the mouth of the clay oven closed.

When a new clay oven for baking bread is built, first, meat pastries (*samsa*) should be baked inside it, as otherwise the woman might lose her speech. *Samsa* is a dough pastry filled with meat. The first thing to be put on the table is bread, in an even number. If bread is put upside down, one's business would not succeed. If a child eats bread in the toilet, it is believed that the child will become blind. It is prohibited to step over bread, even small pieces. Pieces of bread should be cleaned before making the bed; otherwise that person might see nightmares. These ideas are linked to a respect for food which is not to be eaten in dirty places.

If a son joins the army, it is assumed that he bit small pieces of bread and this bread hangs on the wall until his return. Behind this ritual is the idea that the son, like bread, should be well respected while serving in the army. It is believed that the

bread wishes for the safe return of the son from the army. When the son comes back from the army, the dried bread from the wall is given to him and no one else. Bread is preserved for his honor and safety.

The prepared food is supposed to be given to the head of the household to try first and eat, usually the father. The mother or daughters can taste only to check salt content, but the first course is given to a man. If girls eat some meat from the cauldron while cooking food, this is considered as taking away someone else's blessing. In such cases, the girl's happiness might vanish. This rule applies when guests are at home; if guests are at home, the main course is first given to guests and then the father. Thereafter, women and children get some food to eat. This custom is followed by properly raised and educated people and those who do not follow this rule are considered uneducated.²⁹ Leftovers also have special meaning, associated with success, luck, and grace. Therefore, it is expected that no food goes to waste. Usually, boys eat their food quickly and go off to play, and girls are given the task of cleaning the rest of the table. They are encouraged to clean the leftovers. If the leftovers are eaten and cleaned by girls, it means that their mothers-in-law will like them in the future. If they do not perform these tasks, they are told that their future husbands might leave them. By warning of such consequences, parents hope to engage girls in cleaning, as this will be one of their main tasks when they get married in the future.

Regarding clothes, there are also special prohibitions. It is suggested that children should always put their right hand or foot first. This idea is linked to having a successful business. If someone is in a hurry and forgets this rule, this person's business is expected to suffer. Clothes are also supposed to be taken off in the right way as well. Children are warned that if they undress in the wrong way (i. e. upside down), they will not be happy in the future. Hats are not supposed to be stepped over and doing so might give the person a headache. It is prohibited to put shoes opposite the entrance to the yurt, an honorable place, or at the front corner, as the home might lose its spirit, soul, happiness, luck, and grace. A person with new shoes is asked to jump over a ditch, so he can wear his shoes for a long time. New clothes are not to be worn on Saturdays, or they might be burnt as well.

To sum up, during their upbringing children are subject to numerous rules and customs. It would be wrong to think that such prohibitions are strongly enforced. The idea behind all of these prohibitions is to make sure that children listen to their parents and respect their elders, taking their advice into consideration. Children are told of overblown consequences to deter them from undesired behavior. These prohibitions acted as a reminder to children about how to act. Even once children grow up, these prohibitions are observed and passed on to the next generation. These prohibitions and regulations are the main arsenal of ethnopedagogy, and thus are connected to a person's safety and health. This is done by following and respecting local culture, ethics, and traditions. All of the prohibitions have been adapted to new realities over time.

²⁹ *Kabus Naama*, Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1983, p. 36.



CHAPTER 4

RITUALS AND FOLKLORE RELATED TO FUNERALS

Among Kyrgyz

The existing body of scholarship, based on folklore and historical and ethnographic information, highlights that the Kyrgyz have had a long history of funeral and other related rituals. The *Manas* epic is one such example, as it possesses the ancient beliefs of the Kyrgyz, and explicitly highlights the survival of the funeral tradition. For example, Khan Kökötöi is one of the leading protagonists in the *Manas* epic, and his funeral feast upon death has since attracted a lot of special attention. When Khan Kökötöi died, his relatives were invited to a big feast, where horse races were organized, and in which the winners were well rewarded. The idea was that such an abundant treat was to be arranged in honor of the deceased and in order to scatter his wealth. Using this example, the epic attempted to highlight how the Kyrgyz did not care about the accumulation of wealth and its insignificance after one's death. When Kökötöi died, he was buried by following these testaments:

The flesh from his bones was scrapped off with a sword
He was washed with *kymyz* (fermented mare's milk)
He was tied to an armor, forged in gold (or steel)³⁰

This is regarded as one of the most ancient rituals of burying the deceased, namely by separating the person's flesh from their bones. In other words, Kyrgyz forefathers paid more attention to the bones rather than the flesh. This was closely related to their social organization and nomadic lifestyle. Each tribal group had their own cemeteries. Knowing that the body could not be transported for a long time from one place to another, upon the death of a Kyrgyz person, if they were far from their supposed burial place, their relatives would separate their bones from their flesh and carry them to the site. The bones were believed to be eternal, while the rest of the body was merely temporary. Any kinds of sores usually disappeared from the human flesh, but they could not be removed from the bones. As such, the bones were highly valued and seen as the most valued possession.

³⁰ *Manas*. Vol. 3, Version by Sagynbai Orozbek uulu. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1981, p. 11.



*A Cemetery, Kan village of Batken district.
(Photo by the author).*

The word 'bone' refers not only to the deceased as mentioned above, but also to the living. When the family marries off one of its young male members, the family use the expression 'we have got the bone' (*söök aldyk*); while a person with good health is referred to as having 'clean bones' (*taza söök*); and when two old affines reunite; they call this 'renewing the bones' (*söök jangyrtuu*). There is also a proverb, which says: 'Friendship can be destroyed but never the bones' (*dos airylat, söök kairylat*). Before allowing children to study under the supervision of a *mullah*, parents used to say 'the bone was mine; the flesh was yours' (*söögu meniki, eti seniki*). These sayings and practices related to the bone highlight its importance and high value among the Kyrgyz. In general, the Kyrgyz used to hold a particular attitude towards cemeteries, by preserving, hiding and protecting them from their enemies. The destruction of cemeteries and the removal of bones are considered sinful. In the epic *Manas*, he was worried about his bones and discussed the issue with his wife, Kanykei:

It seemed that enemies might come to my body
It should not happen that my cemetery would be opened by enemies
It should not happen that my bones would be forced to drag on the road
It should not happen that my bones would be eaten by big dogs
Be cautious of protecting my bones properly
Try to hide my bones so that no one could know it
Get advice from Bakai and bury my bones in an unknown place.³¹

³¹ *Manas*. Version by Saiakbay Karalaev. Bishkek: Turar, 2019, p. 954.



*A Cemetery, Oy-Tal village, Alaykuu valley of Kara-Kulja district.
(Photo by the author).*

Therefore, Kanykei made sure that the bones were buried in a secret place in the high black cliff of Echkilik. Bakai advised Kanykei to make bones from a tree and bury the body in front of many people as if it was Manas; while the real bones were elsewhere. There were two main reasons to hide Manas's bones: firstly, it was important not to treat the bones with disdain and dishonor, and second, if an enemy removed his forearm's bone and put it on his grave on an upright position, it would insult a whole generation and future descendants of Manas and lead to the disappearance of his genealogy. The bones of a person are directly connected to their future descendants and their ancestors. To this day, it is prohibited for anyone to point at a cemetery, in the belief that this might anger and insult their ancestors.

The funeral and mourning process is also treated in folklore. For instance, small children are not allowed to lean on sticks, because only those who have lost their parents are allowed to do so and mourn. Children are also prohibited to put their hands on the bottom part of their stomach or expose their elbows. Such practices are afforded only to widows who mourn their dead husbands. It is prohibited to prop up one's chin with one's palms, as it represents sadness and mourning. Parents would also forbid children to make prolonged exhalations with noise and sigh heavily. It was also not advised for children to make a clicking sound with their tongue, out of fear that they would eat their parents, and then, unable to find any food to eat, would start making clicking sounds with their tongue. Children are not allowed to put their hands on top of their head, as by doing so they may die early. In the past, parents used to cry aloud when their children died early, saying that their 'hands were on the top of the head'. If children put their hands behind their backs, it is considered a sign of being

an orphan. Apparently, Mongols use to put their hands behind their backs only if they had lost their parents and had become heads of their respected households. Kyrgyz fathers may scold their children when they put their hands behind their backs by saying that their parents are still alive.

The Kyrgyz apparently used to burn the deceased body after death. N. J. Bichurin, in his book entitled *Collection of Materials on Central Asian Peoples in Ancient Times*, highlighted how the Yenisei Kyrgyz used to wrap the deceased's body three times in a shroud at the funeral mourning, and then burn it.³² A year later, the body's remains were buried and again mourned. The 11th century Arab geographer, Idrisi also mentioned that the Kyrgyz used to burn the body and that the ashes were thrown in the river.³³

In the *Manas* epic, it was clearly shown that a deceased person was to be wrapped in fabric and transferred to another place for burial. In the epic, the bodies of Manas and K k t i were wrapped in leather and tied to armor, forged in gold (or steel). The leather for the deceased is important among the Kyrgyz and only heroes or the richest could follow this ceremony. Apparently, if the bones were kept for a long time, this was a sign of respect and honor for the deceased, therefore some influential leaders were not immediately buried but rather preserved for a year or longer. As the epic highlights:

The singers used to praise the deceased
The bones were hidden from the enemies of the deceased
A lot of livestock was slaughtered
The bones were kept for a while³⁴

The delayed burial process can be connected to the farewell ceremony of the deceased, because it might take a long time for many relatives, affines, and other distant relatives to hear of the news and come to the funeral. If the deceased enjoyed a good reputation and was honored by many, their social network would be more widespread; therefore, their family members would wait until most of their social network came and paid their respect.

The 16th century author Seifi claimed that the Kyrgyz used to put the bodies of their deceased inside a coffin to then be hung on a tree.³⁵ If the body was supposed to be transported far away, it would be stored and kept for as long as required. The case of Khan K k t i highlights this particular practice. A special coffin called *yjyk* is prepared, which protects the bones from heat and keeps the temperature at the

³² N. Ya. Bichurin (Yakinf). *Baiyrky mezhilde Orto Aziyada jashagan elder tuuraluu maalmattardyn jynagy. Kyrgyzdar* (Collection of Information about the Peoples Living in Ancient Central Asia. The Kyrgyz). Vol. 1, Bishkek: "Biyiktik," 2011, p. 12.

³³  . Karayev. *Baiyrky t rk estelikleri jana arab-pers avtorloru kyrgyzdar jana Kyrgyzstan j n nd . Kyrgyzdar* (Old Turkic Monuments and Arab-Persian Authors about the Kyrgyz and Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz). Vol. 1, Bishkek: Biyiktik, 2011, p. 213.

³⁴ *Manas*: Vol. 1, 1978, p. 305.

³⁵ Z. Mamytbekov and E. Abdyldayev. *Manas eposun izild n n kee bir maseleleri* (Some Issues in the Study of the Epic Manas). Frunze: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz SSR, 1966, p. 42. 3.

suitable level. Inside the coffin, the bones can be preserved for a long time. Khan K k t i's bones were kept inside such a coffin. Even though Islam encourages a deceased's warm body to be buried quickly, the Kyrgyz have partially preserved their old traditions, despite the influence of Islam. Today, the deceased are buried two or three days after death.

Almost all Kyrgyz funeral customs are influenced by pre-Islamic or Islamic traditions. It is an obligatory ritual to slaughter either a horse or a cow on the day of the death, to distribute money among close relatives and exchange fabrics at the funeral. The most essential part of the funeral rite is to have a respectful attitude towards the deceased. In the dying state, each person leaves a will to be executed as they so express. The body of the deceased is to rest in the yurt. Only close female relatives and children are to be inside the yurt, while close male relatives and children are to be outside the yurt where they lament aloud. All the women in the yurt sit facing the walls and lament loudly, but all the men outside the yurt stand and face the yurt. Kyrgyz scholars Elmira K ch mkulova and Sulaiman Kaiypov conducted extensive research on the tradition of singing *koshok*, funeral laments among the Kyrgyz.³⁶



Kyrgyz women lamenting the death of their close family member inside the yurt by singing koshok. (Photo by E. K ch mkulova).

³⁶ E. K ch mkulova. *Tir n n k rk  syi bolot,  lg nd n k rk  yi bolot. Eldik koshoktor jana koshokchular* (Respect Graces the Living, Lamentation Graces the Dead: Funeral Lamentations and Lamenters). Bishkek: University of Central Asia, 2014.

S. Kaiypov. *Turkiyada jashagan pamirlik kyrgyzdardyn koshoktoru. Lingva-folkloristikalik bulak katary* (Funeral Laments of the Pamiri Kyrgyz Living in Turkey. As lingua-folkloristic source). E. K ch mkulova, Editor-in-chief, Bishkek: University of Central Asia, 2017.



Kyrgyz men mourning the death of their close family member. (Photo by E. Köchümkulova).

It is important to highlight the cycle of funeral rituals, which consist mainly of several stages: funeral rites – notification of the death of a person to close relatives and friends, wearing black or other mourning clothes, and lamentation. Thereafter, the guests arrive, express their condolences, and make a contribution to the memorial expenses. Once this process is over, the guests are asked to enter the house or yurt, given food, and prayed for by a *mullah*. On the second or third day, before taking the body to the grave, the corpse is washed, wrapped in a shroud, prayed for, and taken to the grave, usually by men. The post-funeral rituals include men returning from the grave crying aloud. Meanwhile, the women are busy distributing the personal belongings of the deceased to close relatives, friends, and children. The memorial cycle takes place after three days, seven days, forty days and then a year.

Burial traditions are linked to folklore and prohibitions. If a sick person did not die quickly, this suffering before death was regarded as if they were hanging somewhere in between this world and another. Another version was that this person was waiting for one of their children from far away before leaving the world. If a person was dying, their children and relatives would be informed urgently. Some would claim that if a rich person was dying, the suffering meant that they could not leave any wealth, property, or cattle behind. Others linked the suffering before dying with killing a person, meaning that if that person had killed someone in their lifetime, their death would not be easy and would take some time.



Tabyt, a wooden bed structure used for carrying a deceased body to the grave. Mangyt village of Aravan district. (Photo by the author).

It is prohibited for children to say goodbye by kissing their dying relatives, otherwise, the child may lose all their teeth. Before the burial, the deceased's body is cleaned and washed. The youngest relatives bring a bowl of water and hold it in their hands without putting it down on the ground. If the bowl is put down, additional death might be caused. A straw is burnt before using the water for washing the corpse. The washing water is not to be touched by hands. The water is poured using only the left hand. The person who washed the deceased body can keep all the washing items (basin, mug, and kettle). It is believed that only after forty days will the deceased person be completely taken to the other world and will not come back.

Among the Kyrgyz, digging a grave was a kind, soul-saving, and good deed that a person could do. If someone sees another digging a grave and does not offer any help, this is regarded sinful. Hence, digging a grave, visiting the deceased's family, and providing support are all considered requirements or indeed obligations among all Kyrgyz. Those who went to the cemetery to bury the deceased body would put soil in a special pot and put it around the body in the ground. The soil that was dug out would be gathered on top of the grave. Even though the deceased's sins will be forgiven, his or her debts would remain even after death which would be paid by his children or relatives. Those who went to the burial would not look back but rather look only straight forward, as there was fear that additional death might come otherwise.

Among Uzbeks

One of the most important life cycle events among Uzbeks also concerned funerals. The Uzbeks used different local terms such as *ulik*, *murda*, *mait*, *jasad*, *kazo kilgan*

odam, to imply a deceased person or a person who had passed away. The Uzbeks followed Islamic religious rules of burial, but at the same time one could also observe pre-Islamic rules of burial, which were mainly based on local traditions. Local people would constantly say to one another that ‘wherever you go, you ended up at Mamai’s grave’. Apparently, in the past there was a person called Mamai, who tried to escape death by any means. However, wherever he went it appeared that a special grave was prepared for him in advance. This implied that one could not escape from death and it was obvious that death might come to anyone at any time.

The Uzbeks have a lot of rituals, beliefs, and superstitions related to burial, funerals, and the avoidance of death. For instance, children are prohibited to cut their nails at night; while they are also not allowed to put their hands under their head, otherwise the Uzbeks believe that something tragic might happen to their parents. Putting a tea cup upside-down implies a reduction of life. Stepping over the water remaining after washing clothes also represents the shortening of one’s life. Standing a broom upright also implies death. Meanwhile, if two brooms are put together side by side, this suggests that two deaths might come at once.

According to folklore, when a person is born, a star might also be born together with that person; and when they die, the person’s star might fly away just like the person’s soul. The counting of stars, therefore, is forbidden by the Uzbeks. Whenever the Uzbeks see a star flying, they spit three times in the direction of a fruit tree. By doing this, the Uzbeks believe that they can prevent a potential death. If someone dies on a Monday, a favorite tree in the yard is cut down in order to prevent death coming to the yard. Monday in Persian is “*Dushanba*”, and the ‘du’ symbolizes ‘two’; hence the need to try and prevent two separate deaths in one day. In some occasions, holes in a person’s clothes are not sewn before taking them off in order to prevent a death. This ritual is related to the shroud wrapped around the deceased, so that once a person has died, their shroud is not untied or separated. The number forty is associated with a threat or danger for Uzbek men, therefore when a man reaches forty years old, they will not say their real age, bypassing the number forty as a way to secure themselves from potential unknown danger.

A howling dog is also a sign of death; therefore, such a dog will be driven out of the house in the belief that the dog wants the owner to die. This belief is widespread among both the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, because they view dogs as having clairvoyant qualities; therefore, a howling dog is considered to be aware of its owner’s impending death. A cockerel’s crow has a negative connotation especially in the middle of the night, as they are also believed to have clairvoyant qualities. Such cockerels are slaughtered immediately, in order to avoid a death in the household.³⁷

³⁷ Ornithologists believe they know the secret qualities of a cockerel’s crow. According to them, domestic cockerels originate from the peninsula Malacca in the Indian Ocean. On the equator, the length of day and night are equal every day in each season. Thus, all the cockerels living across the whole island as well as outside of the island have the same ancestral memories to react to the equatorial time zones, which are passed from generation to generation. Thus, the wild ancestors of the cockerels started crowing at six in the morning in Malacca, which has had some effects on the cockerels in other parts of the world.

All kinds of actions, words, and jokes related to funerals, burials, death, and graves are considered negative. If the middle of two eyebrows itch this means that someone might die soon. If a pillow is put upside down, this is not a good sign because only an upside-down pillow is presented to the deceased. It is entirely prohibited to pass tea or food with the left hand; and should this be attempted; the receiving person is likely to refuse it.

When pouring water from a kettle or ladle, if a person pours it in the opposite direction to oneself, it is considered unforgivable as this is done only during the washing of the deceased's body. If a person sits with legs crossed, this indicates that when they die their legs will be crossed when being buried in the grave, and this is a bad sign as it will bring more death afterwards. Hands should not hang freely, as this resembles the deceased's hands. In addition, one should not stand at a sleeping person's head, because this kind of act is associated with wishing the person's death. In order to avoid additional deaths, a mourning person should not go to another mourning person's house, out of fear that two persons' mourning might result in additional mourning.

Dreams are another interesting aspect to highlight here, because if the person sees in their dream that a deceased's relatives, parents, and friends appear and ask to join them, this indicates the danger of a possible death. In such cases, praying for the spirit of the deceased is a good strategy by inviting close neighbors, friends, and relatives and preparing seven fried pieces of bread. This bread should be distributed among the close ones. This act implies the satisfaction of deceased people.



*Men attending a burial at the Iyri-Suu cemetery.
Iyri-Suu village of Ozgön district. (Photo by the author).*

The Uzbeks have a number of rituals that help prevent the coming of death by strictly following certain unwritten rules and regulations. For instance, onion peels are not meant to be burned, as this implies that upon death, the person will be burned in hell. Meanwhile, human hair or nails are also not supposed to be burnt, as it is believed that a human's soul is hidden in them.

Another aspect to highlight is that if someone does not want to be burnt in hell, one should not take a photo of oneself. This practice is tied to Islamic beliefs in which only God had the right to create the physical appearance of a human being. Initially this applied to paintings, before it was then linked to photography. However, this rule is not strictly followed.

People believed that, upon death, the deceased should cross the judgment bridge to the other world, but in order to avoid slipping from the bridge, a person during their lifetime should not wash the soles of their feet with soap. A person who has drunk water into which a spider fell indicates that the person will commit suicide, therefore, and as a result food and water are expected to be covered. Some children would cry by looking at heaven, and in order to stop this action, parents would say that they may lose their mother if they continue.

People follow a number of steps in order to avoid death, but knowing that death is unavoidable, there are certain rules for the preparation of death. If a woman makes steamed *pelmenis* (*chuchbara*), she is expected to make them all equally beautiful; and by doing so, it is believed that when she dies many people will attend her funeral.

As mentioned above, no one can avoid death. Once a person has died, they are quickly put into the earth and buried. For instance, if a person dies in the morning, they should be buried in the afternoon; while if a person dies in the evening, they should be buried in the morning the next day. The body is washed with the intention that it be clean, so it can join the most respected slaves of God. If the water prepared for washing the body is given to an alcoholic, the Uzbeks believe that the alcoholic will stop their drinking habits forever. Only close relatives are allowed to enter the room to help wash the body. Cats are banned from entering the room where the deceased rests, in the belief that they will steal the faith of the deceased. If an old person dies, an underlay or mat for dough (*supura*) is put on the deceased's body, in the hope that long life is passed to the family members. If a sick person goes around the deceased three times while holding the underlay or mat for dough, this person is believed to be cured from any sort of ailment within a short period of time. Another belief is that when sick people and children, especially those with epilepsy, go outside and ask the deceased to take their illness with them, the deceased will take the illness with them to the grave. Even the wrapped blanket around the deceased body is said to have a special curing and sacred quality; therefore, if a person with back problems puts the blanket on the top of their back, it is believed that the blanket will cure their back problems.

The Uzbeks have a ritual associated with the death of young unmarried girls. If an unmarried young girl accidentally dies, a special wedding ceremony will be organized

for her honor, by showing her dowries to everyone and hanging a curtain up in the yard or in the house. Behind the curtain, her female relatives, friends, and sisters cry saying '*jar jar*', which are the lyrics to a goodbye song sung when a girl gets married. By organizing a fake wedding ceremony before taking the girl to the grave, the Uzbeks hope that their daughter will not regret that she died without being married and that the ceremony was held even in her absence. In other words, the parents fulfill her dream – to be married.

For instance, in 2010, in the village of Kashkar Kyshtak, a young unmarried girl passed away and the rituals associated with a fake marriage were organized. The same happened with a young unmarried boy, whose funeral was organized by incorporating the marriage ceremony. Apparently, the Kyrgyz also had similar rituals, especially among the Ichkilik tribes, but later this ritual disappeared and during the Soviet Union, it was completely forgotten about.

During the funeral ritual, mourning relatives wear dark blue colors. The number of female relatives who wear mourning clothes should be odd, such as three or five. These women are not allowed to attend any happy events and celebrations until the mourning period ends, which is about 40 days.

The deceased person's household should not cook any kind of food for three days after the person's death; instead the relatives and neighbors should help the mourning family to prepare food. In addition, food such as steamed *pelmenis*, stuffed and rolled pasta, and dumplings (*manty*) are not supposed to be cooked with green vegetables, pumpkin, and eggs. This ritual is respected in order to avoid any further deaths in the household. These rules should be strictly followed for forty days after the person's death. Many friends, relatives, and acquaintances visit the mourning family to express condolences and to offer up gifts to help cover memorial expenses.

For the mourning family, there are several prohibitions. For instance, one should not wash clothes within three days after the person's death, while dishes are not to be stacked for forty days after the person's death in order to avoid any further deaths in the household. In addition, one should not chop firewood for forty days after the person's death; while the widow is not allowed to go outside of the yard for the same period of time. Furthermore, the widow should put her ring on her middle finger as the sign of widowhood; and the room in which the deceased was laid should be quiet and peaceful for one year, therefore loud music and jokes in the room are not allowed. Every Thursday people visit the family of the deceased and pray for their spirit. The widows do not mourn for three days after their husband's passing and instead, they should mourn for up to four months and ten days. This rule originated from the hadith. If food is prepared, it is devoted to the deceased's spirit for a period of one year after the person's death. Only after one year can the family could go back to their normal lives.

According to the hadith, it is better to sit on a fire rather than on a grave. One should not put a stone on the top of the grave and the grave should not be surrounded

by iron or wire barriers, otherwise the deceased's spirit may look like it is in a prison. The grave is considered a sacred place; one can go and pray there. On the day of a burial, only men are allowed to go, while women are allowed to go only the next day. Any young woman who has lost a child is not allowed to go to a grave; otherwise, the dead child might think that their mother came to ask for payment (*süt aky*). *Süt aky* usually represents gifts of the mother of the bride (when she leaves the groom's house after the wedding ceremony). After coming from the graves, men are usually asked to clean their clothes and shoes out of fear that devil spirits (*ins-jinlar*) have penetrated their clothes.

In short, Islam has influenced some Uzbek and Kyrgyz funeral practices and folk beliefs. Funeral practices are fluid; and have been flexible enough to incorporate ancient pre-Islamic beliefs and rituals. People practice them not only to mark the physical separation of the deceased from the living, but value them as they teach them to come together in difficult times and understand their role and obligations in their communities. Funeral practices embody people's philosophical views about death and meaning of what life is after death.

CONCLUSION

Kyrgyzstan is the home of many ethnic groups. In this book, the local traditions and rituals of the country's two main ethnic groups – the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek – have been described in a comparative perspective, by highlighting their similarities as well as differences. Both the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks share a common Turkic language, religion and cultural patterns. Despite some minor differences, these groups have been living side by side for centuries by keeping their culture distinct and close at the same time. The research has revealed how two ethnic groups have preserved their rituals, local traditions, and folk beliefs, while their cultural patterns and traditional experiences have been flexible enough to adapt to new realities and conditions of societal changes. Unfortunately, very few comparative studies were done by local scholars. As a result, many people, especially the youth are not aware of the fact that these two ethnic groups share a lot in their cultural practices.

The monograph has examined the local life cycle events of the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, with particular regard to the birth of children, their upbringing, and rituals related to marriage and funerals. The study not only describes how these life cycle events are practiced, but also tells how different kinds of folk beliefs and rituals are attached to these practices. Examples were provided from ethnographic research and additional material has been taken from the Kyrgyz epic *Manas*, folklore, and existing literature. The idea of the ethnographic work was not to focus on small details but to show the meaningful reasons behind the small details. As the famous scholar N.L. Zhukovskaia claims: "There is no small details for an ethnographer, instead the small details are the ethnographer's material."³⁸ These ethnographic details prove the common root of the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

Culture is very important for people, since it affects how people behave and act and makes their lives more meaningful and fulfilling. Therefore, people make sure that informal institutions like rituals, traditions, and beliefs are strictly followed, since these concern their worldview, history, and relationship with nature and other ethnic groups. They also incorporate education, moral upbringing, customs, and local ethics. In sum, these unwritten rules and regulations are an integral part of people's spiritual culture.

An attentive reader will see the common cultural patterns of the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. However, these two groups have their own distinct features in their cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and language. Like the colors of the rainbow, cultural diversity makes people's life interesting and harmonious.

To conclude, this work will reference the poem 'My Dagestan', by the poet Rasul Gamzatov. In this, he underscores one moment which fits perfectly with what this

³⁸ Zhukovskaya N. L. *Sud'ba kochevoi kul'tury. Rasskazy o Mongolii i mongolah*. Moscow: Nauka, 1990, p. 57.

paper has described. 'Kislovodsk. We were two persons in one room. It is me, and the other one was Uzbek. We had the same view from the window: the top of Elbrus, both during the night and day. One said that the Elbrus reminded him of two young bold boys, but the other one said that the Elbrus reminded him of one elderly Uzbek man carrying two plates of rice pilaf'.³⁹ The purpose behind this study is to show how two different ethnic groups have different views of the same phenomenon.

This work is my first attempt to analyze Kyrgyz and Uzbek cultural patterns in comparative perspective, and as such, it does not cover all the common cultural patterns of the two related peoples. I hope there will be more opportunities in the future to collaborate with other scholars and researchers to do more in-depth research on the subject.

³⁹ Gamzatov Rasul. *Menin Dagstanym*. Translated by A. Toktogulov. *Novels*, Book 1-2, Bishkek: Biyiktik, 2005, pp. 28-29.

GLOSSARY

Aidar – the patron of wind, invited by whistling to clean grain.

Aidar kökül – forelock worn by little boys.

Ak kalpak – traditional men's hat made from white felt.

Aksakal – elderly man, community leader.

Albarsty – an evil spirit that strangles people in dreams, especially pregnant women during delivery of their child.

Anachy – midwife.

Arbak – spirit, ghost.

Arkan tosuu – tradition of blocking the road of the groom with a rope, which is not removed unless a payment for entrance is paid for the bride.

Ayash apa – father's best friend's wife.

Azan chakyrUU – a call for prayer which is also used by a mullah or elderly man when announcing a newborn baby's name into his/her ear.

Badam chai – tea with almonds, given to a pregnant woman before giving birth.

Barpy – one of the most prevalent diseases in childhood, in which the shape of the child's skull is deformed, and a seam emerges. This process involves the child losing a lot of their hair.

Bayana – benevolent spirit and the patroness of children and women in childbirth.

Bayandos saluu – laying down a new carpet in order to welcome the groom.

Bel kuda – establishing affinal ties even before the birth of children.

Beshbarmak – (lit. "five fingers") traditional dish made of boiled meat and noodles.

beshek – cradle.

Beshik kuda – establishing affinal ties when the children are still in the cradle, i. e., small.

Boorsok – small pieces of fried bread.

Bozo – a drink made from boiled and fermented millet grains.

Bulak – spring water.

bychak pulu – lit. "knife money", a payment asked by the bride's younger brother before allowing her sister to enter the groom's house.

Chach aluu – a ritual related to the cutting of a child's hair on the fortieth day.

Chimildik (Uzb.) – curtain behind which the newly-weds sit for several days after their wedding.

Chiy – high hard steppe grass, the stems of which go to the manufacturing of the mats.

Chuchbara – *pelmenis* (dumplings).

Chükö – knee bone of a sheep.

Chükö – sheep's knuckle bone.

Chyk kirine chyk, chyk! – “Get out the sickness inside, go out the evil spirit inside.” These words are said during the healing ritual to drive away the evil spirits believed to have entered the body of a child.

Doira – frame drum used among sedentary Central Asians including Uzbeks and Tajiks.

Dutor – a two-stringed, long-necked, fretted lute used among the sedentary peoples of Central Asia.

Eesi – master spirits of some illnesses.

Eki kat – two-layered woman, i. e., pregnant.

Emgek – a soft spot on the newborn baby's head (fontanelle).

Haram – not pure.

Hatna – a feast offered to celebrate a boy's circumcision by slaughtering a sheep or a rooster.

Ichkilik – one of the three tribal groups of Kyrgyz living in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Ins-jinlar (Uzb.) – devil spirits.

It köinök – “a dog's shirt”, i. e., the first shirt worn by the baby.

It talgak – dog's craving, an experience among pregnant women who want to eat everything or do not want to eat anything at all.

It tolgoo – “dog's labor”, a term used to describe pregnant women who give birth quickly.

Itiy – rickets.

Jar-jar – traditional wedding song.

Jeen – a sister's son or daughter.

Jengche – a glove for baking bread in a clay oven.

Jenge – the older brother's wife.

Jeti tokoch – seven pieces of fried round bread, used in the healing of a sick child.

Jüktüü – a load-carrying woman, i. e., pregnant.

Jürögü tüshtü – to be very scared, intimidated, and frightened.

Juuchu – matchmaker.

Jüzachty – the ceremony of the uncovering of the bride's face after the wedding, which is done by a small boy with a tree branch.

Kaiyn ata – father in-law.

Kaiyn ene – mother in-law.

Kalyng – bride-wealth, also known as bride price, to be paid by the groom's parents.

Kanykei – the wife of the hero Manas in the *Manas* epic.

- Kara daly* – a term used for an old maid.
- Kazan* – iron cauldron.
- Kindik ene* – cord mother, i. e., woman who cuts the umbilical cord of the baby.
- Kirine kirüü* – a belief in which the evil spirit has entered the child's body.
- Kiyit* – gifts of clothes exchanged during feasts and weddings.
- Kökötoi* – one of the leading protagonists in the *Manas* epic.
- Kökül chach* – forelock worn by little boys.
- Kosh boiluu* – a two-bodied woman, i. e., pregnant.
- Köshögö* – a curtain behind which a bride sits for several days when she comes to her husband's house.
- Köshögö jyidy* – ceremony of taking away the bride's curtain after twenty or forty days.
- Köshögöng kögörsün* – *lit.* "let your curtain prosper!" A wish for the bride to have a happy marriage.
- Koshok* – a funeral lament sung by women when a person dies.
- Koumiss* – fermented mare's milk.
- Köz monchok* – beads with the image of eyes, used to protect from evil eyes.
- Kuda* – a term of address for an in-law, i. e., father in-law of one's children.
- Kuda tüshüü* – visiting the potential bride's house to ask for her hand.
- Kudagyi* – a term of address for an in-law, mother in-law of one's children.
- Kudalashuu* – establishing affinal ties.
- Külchö* (Uzb.) – small round bread baked in a clay oven.
- Kundak* – a type of cradle for newborn infants.
- Kurak* – traditional patchwork made of various fabric scraps sown together.
- Kutadgu Bilig* – poem written by the outstanding 11th century Turkic poet and thinker, Yusuf Balasaguni.
- Kymyz* – fermented mare's milk.
- Kyrky* – the first forty days, the first stage after a child is born that requires caution for the child for several reasons.
- Kyrkyn chygaruu* – a ritual of marking the first forty days of the baby, involving women who bathe the baby with 40 spoonsful of water and cut his nails and hair.
- Kyz kuumai* – a horse race between a young woman and a young man, where the boy kisses the girl if he catches her.
- Kyz uzatuu* – the girl's farewell feast, organized by her parents.
- Kyzamyk* – measles.
- Mahalla* (Uzb.) – community, neighborhood.

Manas – the name of the Kyrgyz epic and its main hero.

Manty – dumplings.

Mastava (Uzb.) – a thick rice soup with vegetables, peas, and lamb.

Mazar – clothes and food (forty different kinds of food) sent by the girl's mother to the groom's parents and the groom.

Nikah (Uzb.) – marriage agreement, a contract between the bride and groom in the presence of two witnesses, after which the newlyweds can consider themselves husband and wife.

Niyaz – another word used for forelock, used by the Kyrgyz from the Ichkilik tribe.

Ökül ata – representative father or godfather.

Ökül ene – representative mother or godmother.

Öpkö chabuu – lit. “to hit with a lung,” a ritual of using the lung of a freshly slaughtered goat to gently hit the backs of the bride and the groom to avoid disease and unhappiness.

Ong, ong, ong bol – lit. “be in the right position”, words said during the ritual performed to correct the baby's position before the delivery.

Osh (Uzb.) – rice pilaf.

Otko kirgizüü – tradition of inviting the newlyweds by the groom's older brothers with the aim of introducing the daughter-in-law to her husband's relatives.

Paranja (Uzb.) – veil or scarf to cover the head and face of the bride.

Patir (Uzb.) – a special type of bread, which is made of milk, flour, butter, and some ornaments of flowers.

Patir sindiruu' (Uzb.) – a ceremony of bread breaking.

Rubab – a plucked, long-necked lute with a membrane covered with resonating chamber used among the sedentary peoples of Central Asia.

Saima – handmade embroidered decorations on a fabric, made with a needle and thread.

Samsa – meat pastries.

Sapar – the second month according to the Islamic calendar.

Sapar kachty – an old ritual, meaning “*Sapar* go away,” to distance the bad aura from the village.

Sarpoi (Uzb.) – combination of the Persian words “*sar*” (head) and “*poi*” (feet) meaning gifts of clothes from top to toe, symbolizing affinal ties.

Sebet (Uzb.) – a round basket filled with all kinds of gifts and food and brought to the feast.

Sep – bride's dowry.

Shaitan – the devil.

Shimek – a tube for draining urine, inserted between the legs of the child lying in the cradle.

Söök jangyrtuu – ‘renewing the bones’ of distant relatives through marriage of children.

Sovchi (Uzb.) – matchmaker.

Süiünchü – a gift of the message of joyful news.

Sumalak (Uzb.) – a sacred food made from wheat, millet, and barley during Navruz, Spring Equinox. Its preparation time is almost 24 hours.

Supura – an underlay or mat for dough, made of sheep and goatskin.

Süt aky – gifts to the mother of the bride by to be given by the groom’s parents.

Taiake – the mother’s brother.

Taiene – the child’s maternal grandmother.

Tandyr – clay oven.

Taza söök – ‘clean bones’, a person with good health.

Tergöö – tradition of avoiding calling in-laws by their names.

Toga (Uzb.) – the mother’s elder brother.

Töshök talashuu – one of the many games organized specifically for weddings as form of entertainment before sending the bride to the groom’s house.

Tushoo kesüü – a ritual performed to celebrate the first steps of a toddler by cutting the cord tied to the legs of the toddler.

Tuz buiruu or *tuz tatau* – lit.: “try our salt”, inviting someone to taste their food, eat together and enjoy the hospitality.

Tuz ursun – cursed by salt and punished.

Tuzdash-daamdash boluu – knowing each other well and being friendly to one another.

Tuzu aram – to be depraved, ungrateful; ingratitude.

Tuzu kötörülüü – lit.: “the salt has been increased”, a phrase used if someone becomes successful or lucky.

Tuzun aktoo – taking on another person’s responsibility, meaning thankful or justified.

Tuzuna kara sanoo – a phrase meaning that that person has bad intentions and thoughts, and therefore one should be careful.

Ulik (also *murda*, *mait*, *jasad*, *kazo kilgan odam*) (Uzb.) – terms used in reference to a deceased person.

Umai ene – Mother *Umai*, protector of children.

Usma (Uzb.) – dye for eyebrows made from vegetables.

Yjyk – a special coffin used in ancient times to protect the bones of the deceased from heat and keep the temperature at the suitable level.

Ysyktanuu – lit. “steaming,” a traditional medical technique for women to become pregnant by eating a lot of hot food together with their husbands.

PROVERBS AND SAYINGS

1. "A lone horse does not leave dust behind; a lone man cannot become famous". (*Jalgyz attyn changy chykpaıt; jalgyz erdin dangky chykpaıt*).
2. "If two villages live side by side, their livestock shares one corral". (*Aiıly aralashıyn koyu koroolosh*).
3. "If two contrasting winds come together, there will be frost, but if two peoples come together, there will be prosperity". (*Jelge jel koshulsa jut, elge el koshulsa kut*).
4. "Don't consider a bull as your cattle, and don't consider a single man as your son". (*Bukany malym debe, boidoktu balam debe*).
5. "The descendants of women from the same village are equal to very thin and skinny dogs, the descendants of women from the same region are equal to wolves, and the descendants of women from outside of one's region are equal to lions". (*Öz aiılynan ayal algandyn tukumu – küypül küchük, kyr ahsyryp algandyn tukumu – karyshkyr, ashuu ashryyp algandyky – arstan*).
6. "You should give koumiss (fermented mare's milk) to someone who asks to have a drink, you should give a daughter to someone who asks to take her". (*Kymyzdy icheknge ber, kyzdy suraganga ber*).
7. "Matchmakers come to good people, chasers come to bad people" meaning blessed ones receive matchmakers, ill-fated ones receive complainants. (*Yrystuuga juuchu kelet, jamanga kuuchu kelet*).
8. "Whoever has a daughter, he or she flirts". (*Kyzy bardyn nazy bar*).
9. "Before establishing affinal ties, inquire about each other's family background, but once the affinal ties established, follow the rule to respect affinal relatives even if they are poor or slaves". (*Kuda bolgucha kimdigingdi surash, kuda bolgondon kiyin kul da bolso syilash*).
10. "Friendship lasts for a hundred years, but affinal ties last for a thousand years". (*Dos jüz jyldyk, kuda ming jyldyk*).
11. "God blesses those who become in-laws, the Prophet blesses those who become friends". (*Kuday koshkon kuda bolot, paygambar koshkon dos bolot*).
12. "We are expressing submission." This implies that the boy's family is completely obedient towards the girl's family. (*Kuldugubuz bar, kuda*).
13. "Put your baby girl into the cradle and start collecting for the dowry" (Uzb.). (*Kizingni beshikka sol, molini teshikka sol*).
14. "Parents who have married off their daughters cannot recover for forty years" (Uzb.). (*Kiz bergan odam kirk yil oziga kelolmaidı*).
15. "A girl should be brought up by forty households" which underscores that it is not the sole role of parents to bring up daughters but also that of the relatives and neighbors. (*Kyzga kyrk jerden tyiu*).
16. "A son-in-law gets old, he can become a *jeen*," which means a sister's son or a kin-related person". (*Küyoö karysa jeen bolot*).

17. "A married daughter is behind a fence" i. e., a married daughter becomes a member of her husband's family and becomes an outsider. (*Chykkkan kyz chiyden tyshkary*).
18. "Let your bridal curtain prosper!" This is to wish a bride a happy marriage. (*Köshögöng kögörsün*).
19. "Let there be many children before you, and behind you (numerous) cattle!" (*Aldyngdy bala, artyngdy mal bassyn*).
20. "The welfare of sheep depends on the shepherd; while the family's well-being depends on the daughter-in-law". (*Koichunun taiagynan, kelindin aiagynan*).
21. "A child must be brought up properly from childhood and a bride has to be brought up from the moment she arrives at her new home". (*Balany jashynan, kelindi bashynan*).
22. "A house with many children is like a bazaar buzzing; a house without children is like a silent grave". (*Balaluu üi-bazar, balasyz üi-mazar*).
23. "A house with children is characteristic of a king". (*Balaluu üi-padyshaluu üi*).
24. "One could be full from eating food, but one could not be full from having children". (*Ashka toigon bar, bashka toigon jok*).
25. "Honey is sweet but children are sweeter". (*Bal shirin, baldan da bala shirin*).
26. "The main source of wealth is a child". (*Döölöttün bashy-perzent*).
27. "The baby who is in the cradle now might become a tribal leader in the future". (*Beshiktegi balanyn bek bolorun kim bilet*).
28. "It is better for seven wolves to come to your home rather than seven sister's children". (*Jeen kelgenche jeti börü kelsin*).
29. "If you have a daughter, you should be attentive". (*Kyzduu bolsong közdüü bol*).
30. "Not a strand of hair should lie in the house which has a daughter". (*Kyzduu üydö kyl jatpait*).
31. "40 horses might be tied to a girl's house," meaning that many will come asking for the girl's hand (Uzb.). (*Kizlik uyga kirk ot boilanar*).
32. "Friendship can be destroyed but never the bones". (*Dos airylat, söök kairylat*).
33. "Wherever you go, you end up at Mamai's grave". (*Kayda barsang Mamaidyn körü*). In the past there was a person called Mamai, who tried to escape death by any means. However, wherever he went it appeared that a special grave was prepared for him in advance. This implied that one could not escape from death and it was obvious that death might come to anyone at any time.
34. "The bone is mine; the flesh is yours". (*Söögu meniki, eti seniki*). Before allowing children to study under the super-vision of a mullah, parents used to say this saying. It highlights the importance and high value of one's bone or tribal affiliation among the Kyrgyz.

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84. Sükürova Asylkan, 42 years old, Kypchak lineage, Batken lineage, Kara-Bulak village.
85. Sydykova Sanabar, 45 years old, Joosh lineage, Alay region, Sopu-Korgon village.
86. Tashbolotova Rabiya, 48 years old, Kangdy lineage, Nookat region, Kara-Tash village.
87. Tashtanbekova Karbek, 70 years old, Kydyrsha lineage, Nookat region, Kara-Tash village.
88. Tokoeva Kalen, 73 years old, Kushchu lineage, Chatkal region, Terek-Say village
89. Toktorova Mastan, 71 years old, Tazdar lineage, Kara-Suu region, Kysh-Abat village.
90. Torobaeva Tamara, 45 years old, Kangdy lineage, Kadamjay region, Halmiyon village.

91. Toroeva İbadat, 71 years old, Kangdy lineage, Kadamjay region, Tash-Döbö village.
92. Torohanova Kasiet, 74 years old, Savay lineage, Kara-Suu region, Savay village.
93. Totoeva Bunisa, 78 years old, Kutchu lineage, Aksy region, Ak-Döbö village.
94. Turganbaeva Kalbübü, 56 years old, Karabagysh lineage, Özgön region, Boston village.
95. Tutasheva Sharapat, 74 years old, Jangashka lineage, Özgön region, Köldük village.
96. Ybyshova Anara, 45 years old, Sarttar lineage, Alay region, Sopus-Korgon village.
97. Ysmailova Aysha, 78 years old, Borbash lineage, Nookat region, Moydunbek village.

Uzbek Respondents

1. Abduvalieva Munisohon, 70 years old, Aravan region, Tepe-Korgon village.
2. Ahmadjanova Faridahon. Aravan region, S. Yusupova village, S.
3. Ahmedova Oyimsa, 69 years old, Aravan region, Chek-Abad village.
4. Akbarova Mukaram, 44 years old, Kara-Suu region, Kayrat village.
5. Alimkulova Ugilhon, 59 years old, Aravan region, Nurabad village.
6. Ganieva Mukadashon, 62 years old, Osh city.
7. Gapirova Mayramhan, 48 years old, Kara-Suu region, Nariman village.
8. Haydarova Salimhon, 44 years old, Kara-Suu region, Tahirov village.
9. İbragimova Mohirahon, 51 years old, Aravan region, Tepe-Korgon village.
10. Kasimova Farida, 44 years old, Osh city.
11. Kasymova Mahburat, 64 years old, Osh city.
12. Kurbonov Mahmudjon, 70 years old, Aravan region, Jarkyshtak village.
13. Kurbonova Fatimohon, 65 years old, Aravan region, Jarkyshtak village.
14. Maksimova Muhabbat, 44 years old, Kara-Suu region, Tashirov village, Dustlik street.
15. Mamazulinov Mohidilhon, 53 years old, Aravan region, Tepe-Korgon village.
16. Mirzakarimova Hamidahon, 38 years old, Kara-Suu region, Tashirov village, Dustlik street.
17. Muminova Sanathan, 52 years old, Osh city.
18. Nurdinova Mohidilhon, 38 years old, Kara-Suu region, Kashkar-Kyshtak village.
19. Nurdinova Nasiba Abdurahmanova, 46 years old, Kara-Suu region, Kashkar-Kyshtak village.
20. Payzullaeva Muharram, 48 years old, Kara-Suu region, Kyzyl-Kyshtak village.
21. Rahmanova Mukaddas, 42 years old, Aravan region, Aravan village.
22. Saydalieva Zarifahon, 44 years old, Aravan region, Chek-Abad village.
23. Sidikova Mukaddam, 70 years old, Kara-Suu region, Kaarman village.
24. Sidikova Soadathon, 65 years old, Kara-Suu region, Kaarman village.

25. Tadjibaeva Mahabat, 62 years old, Kara-Suu region, Nariman village.
26. Talipova Oiyman, 88 years old, Kara-Suu region, Nariman village, Gaipov street.
27. Tilavaldieva Cumahon, Aravan region, S. Yusupova village, S.
28. Tojibaeva Risolata, 76 years old, Aravan region, Tepe-Korgon village.
29. Turaeva Mahfirathon, 67 years old, Aravan region, Tepe-Korgon village.
30. Umarova Fatima, 98 years old, Osh city.
31. Umrzakova Tursunay, 63 years old, Aravan region, Aaravan village.
32. Usmonov Mansur, 71 years old, Osh city.
33. Yakubov Tuhtasin, 70 years old, Aravan village, Cheremushka street-2.

Abdymitalip Murzakmetov
Common Ethno-Cultural Patterns of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks

Designed by *Aida Tostokova*

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was born in 1965 in the village of Kyzyl-Sengir of Suzak district of Jalal-Abad province of Kyrgyzstan. In 1993, he graduated from the Department of Kyrgyz Philology of Osh State University. He is a Candidate of Historical Sciences and ethnographer, and the author of more than 150 scholarly and popular articles and 8 books dealing with Kyrgyz folklore, ethnography, and social issues. Currently, he is working on his doctoral dissertation titled “Kyrgyz Old Beliefs and Practices.”

Murzakmetov received two distinguished state awards: certificate of Honor from the Ministry of Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic for his valuable academic contribution to the celebration of 800th anniversary of Jalal ad-Din Rumi in 2007 and a badge “Kyrgyz tili” from the Kyrgyz Language State Committee under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2014.

Currently, he is a Professor and the head of the Kyrgyz Literature division at Osh State University.