

## **The lifestyles and changes in culture of Afghan Kyrgyz and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan**

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This paper traces changes in the culture of the Kyrgyz ethnic group in the era after the break-up of the USSR. In order to describe correctly changes in their lives, a comparison was used from a wide range of areas where Kyrgyz live. As a basis, the way of life of Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan is used. Kyrgyz here represent the majority, but before the break-up they did not emphasize their ethnicity significantly. After the break up of the USSR and the formation of the national state, they began to look for new, or new-and-old, roots and to strengthen their nationalistic tendencies. Looking for new roots included the creation of historical constructs and emphasizing many specifics of lifestyles of 'real Kyrgyz'. But Kyrgyz live in many other states as a minority – especially in China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. These Kyrgyz, however, often designate different elements of their culture as a basis of their ethnic group compared to Kyrgyz from Kyrgyzstan. The paper first tries to identify important elements of Kyrgyz culture in the era of the break-up of the USSR based on statements of respondents from Kyrgyzstan and to find out if these elements are also important as an identification feature for Kyrgyz in other states. Field research has been conducted in China and Tajikistan, but in this work, results from Afghanistan in particular are presented. The paper also tries to give an answer as to the influence of the formation of the national state (Kyrgyzstan) on members of ethnic groups living in other states as a minority (Kyrgyz in Afghanistan) and how this changed their ethnic identity.

**Keywords:** Kyrgyz; Central Asia; Kyrgyzstan; Afghanistan; cultural changes; transition

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to detail the culture of the Kyrgyz minority living in Afghanistan and to compare it with the Kyrgyz living as the majority population in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>1</sup> This paper will answer the following research questions:

- What do Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan consider typical elements of their culture?
- What are the typical cultural components amongst the Afghan Kyrgyz?
- What are the biggest similarities and differences when comparing the cultures of the Afghan Kyrgyz and the Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan?

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The submitted information is mainly a result of long-term field research conducted between 2007 and 2008 in Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. The focal point of the research into the comparison of cultural differences between north and south Kyrgyzstan was the Suisamyr valley in the Chuy Province and, in the south, the city of Osh and its surroundings, as well as the Batken Province (Batken, Bazarbashe, Isfana). In Afghanistan, the research was conducted in the Shuoldara village near the entry to Wakhan Corridor (see Figure 1). The Kyrgyz from Shuoldara maintain very good relationships with the Kyrgyz in Wakhan.

Research in Afghanistan was conducted in the Kyrgyz language. After codification of the literary Kyrgyz language during the Soviet period (in the territory of today's Kyrgyzstan), there were many restrictions on the use of synonyms, but the synonyms are still commonly used by the Kyrgyz outside of Kyrgyzstan.

Selection of just certain words for a codification of the literary language in 1930s in the USSR was supposed to lead to a greater degree of difference between the newly established literary languages and, for example, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Uzbek – languages of the newly established Soviet Union republics. Until then, there the so-called Turkic-Tatar (Türk-Tatar) language was used officially within the territory of Soviet Central Asia.

Use of certain synonyms in the literary Kyrgyz or Kazakh language, in some cases, is determined by the location where creators of the literary language were studying. Although Kyrgyz and Kazakh are still mutually fully illegible languages for speakers, literary Kazakh took over many Tatar words, because many Kazakh writers and scientists in the era of tsarist Russia (before the year 1917) were studying in Tatar Kazan (for example *cow* in Kyrgyz is *ui*, and in Tatar and Kazakh it is *syir*) (message from a respondent (\*1930, male) from the Tatar village, Tamga, in Kyrgyzstan, 2011).

Afghan Kyrgyz have no problem with understanding literary Kyrgyz, but the Kyrgyz from Kyrgyzstan do not understand many words of the original language.

Some words began to be used by nomadic herdsmen after the year 1917. There are quite a lot of these words and, in Kyrgyzstan, there is only the Russian form (potatoes – *kartoshka*, socks – *naski*, shoes – *tufli*). In Afghanistan, in the language

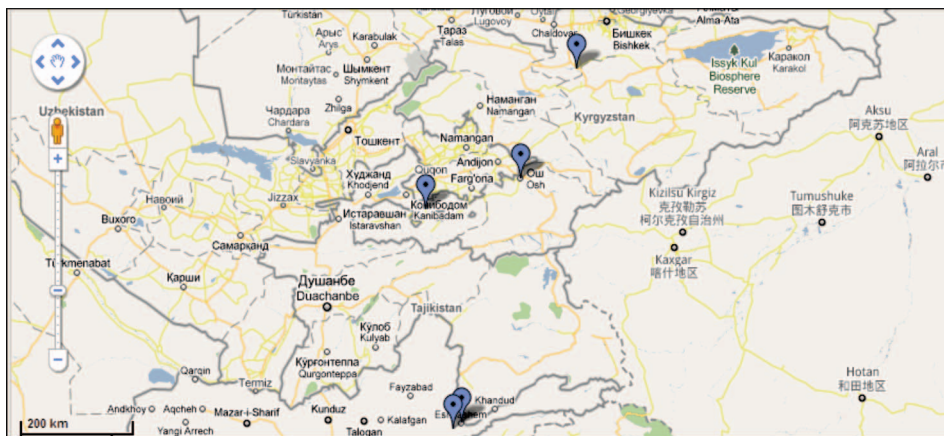


Figure 1. Locations of research conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan. Source: © Google Maps, 2011.

Pashto, potatoes are called *puttaatee*, which originates from English, but local Kyrgyz also use this word. Chinese Kyrgyz use the Chinese term *tudou* for potatoes or the Uighur term *yangyo*, but sometimes one can also hear the Russian term *kartoshka*.

The Turkish historian Hasan Paksoy<sup>2</sup> pays attention also to the differences in language among individual Kyrgyz lineages and mentions that the language variety of the inhabitants in the Turkestan territory was not so considerable. When he showed an extract from the *Alpamysh*<sup>3</sup> epos to an older respondent, printed in Arabic script (where could be more hidden some differences in pronunciation), the older respondent thought it was written in Kyrgyz (Chagatai dialect). This manifests, according to the Paksoy, the language similarity of Turkestan inhabitants and the unnaturalness of the strict separation of the Turkic-language population into Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Uyghurs.

The data concerning the cultural changes were obtained mainly from controlled and semi-controlled conversations, using the comparison generating method, whereby the interviewer tries gradually to ask members of different generations for one cultural item. The respondents should, during these interviews, point out the changes in culture which they personally regard the most important (e.g., *formerly, it was done in that way; today, it is done in this way*).

Because these were open questions, potential respondents had as wide as possible a space to determine the importance of particular topics by themselves. The aim of the interviewer was just to create certain limits, within which respondents should stay:

- changes in their lifestyle over time, indicating eventual milestones causing the biggest changes
- understanding own ethnicity including exclusion from surroundings (ethnics, geographic, religious definition)
- what creates the main essence of their ethnicity according to the opinion of the respondents (image of the 'ideal' Kyrgyz; what conditions he must meet to be still considered Kyrgyz).

To use such a method, however, it is necessary to create a certain relationship of mutual confidence between interviewer and interviewee prior to the interview. Therefore, some of the more sensitive questions could be asked only by a native speaker.

When researching northern and southern Kyrgyzstan, information was obtained from respondents from different age, social and profession groups. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 respondents born between 1921 and 1987, with a higher ratio of men (20:10). The gender imbalance is caused by the situation in Central Asian families in the countryside – if a respondent is woman, mostly a man also participates at the interview. Most respondents were married; only a few of them were single or divorced. In terms of professions, there were teachers, university teachers, herdsmen, local politicians, construction workers, students, photographers, shop assistants, and craftsmen. In terms of social stratification, there were no members of the lowest and highest social and income classes.

In the research, there were no respondents from the youngest group, under 15 years. Besides in-depth interviews, data in the research were used also from other interviews with occasional respondents.

In the research in Afghanistan, only members of the Kyrgyz ethnic group were interviewed – in-depth interviews were conducted with six respondents. The age of

respondents was only estimated (30–80 years) with a deviation of about 10–20 years, because the respondents did not know their age. These respondents were all involved in herding and intensive settled agriculture.

This procedure obtained data evaluating the cultural changes from the perspective of the members of the investigated groups but, in the field research, information evaluating the cultural changes from the point of view of the researcher, who was a member of a quite different culture, is also given. Connecting both these points of view could objectify the evaluation of the cultural changes more.

A certain problem occurs in professional literature focused on Afghan Kyrgyz – research on this topic originates from a relatively distant past (30 years ago), which is mainly caused by the generally unstable situation in this territory and the resulting small amount of research. From the actual long-term research, we could name Ted Callahan<sup>4</sup> or Herrmann Kreutzmann.<sup>5</sup> In this article, there are cited also Soviet (Russian) authors, whose publications are tendentiously processed in some regards, but in other regards are processed very well and used as an essential helper in orientation within Central Asian facts.

### **Kyrgyz ethnicity and elements of Kyrgyz culture**

It is not easy to unambiguously state the oldest mention of the Kyrgyz ethnicity. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, an interest in the history of the independent Kyrgyzstan gradually appeared as a part of the search for new roots and a new identity. Here we see the same phenomenon as with the national revivals of ‘small’ nations in Europe during the nineteenth century – to prove to the world the exceptionality of their own nation in various ways: for example, by its very long history.

Determining cultural elements of any ethnic group is very difficult for many reasons. One of them is the blending together of cultural elements and ethnicity. The second reason is the difficulty of determining typical features that could be assigned to the *ideal* member of the given culture, eventually ethnic group. It is possible to conduct interviews with respondents who declare their own membership to a certain ethnic group and culture (Kyrgyz), but it is also necessary to examine whether specification of certain typical features is not secondarily assumed (for example, with Kyrgyz living abroad, from Kyrgyz satellite TV).

Among the main attributes of ethnicity, there is often mentioned, for example, the existence of one’s own territory (eventually one’s own state formation in such territory), use of the mother language, and eventually religious membership. Ethnic groups’ awareness can be evoked by political interference, for example for the purpose of radicalization when achieving goals or also to divert attention from other topics (for example, a bad economic situation).

Demonstrations of ethnicity may not primarily be based on objective factors, but rather can be based on a very subjective feeling of belonging to a certain nation. Ethnicity is largely relative and variable depending on ambient (and internal) conditions. In China, one can meet with Kyrgyz speaking Kazakh who at the same time profess Buddhism (both highly unusual for Kyrgyz) – these Kyrgyz derive their ethnicity from the common historical awareness and, based ‘only’ on this different awareness, they significantly set themselves aside from their surroundings. Afghan Kyrgyz may set themselves aside from their surroundings on the basis of different language (surrounding ethnic groups speak Indo-European languages), religion

(they are Sunni Muslims compared to the Ismailia surrounding) and historical awareness.

When identifying all the main elements of Kyrgyz culture, there has been a preference for the parts that can be more easily objectivised. When interviewing respondents about typical characteristics of their culture, we often get very similar and non-specific answers applied for almost all cultures, such as hospitality, friendliness, skills to cope in all situations . . .

Therefore this article discusses such cultural elements (except common history or religion) as food or payment for a bride, which, in some cases, really connect Kyrgyz ethnic groups and differentiate them from the surrounding ethnic groups.

### ***Mythology and history***

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz used Manas, the Kyrgyz mythic integrator, as a symbol of Kyrgyz national unity, especially after the USSR's disintegration. The international airport in the capitol city, Bishkek, was named after this hero of Kyrgyz mythology. Also in Bishkek, there is an area reserved for Manas near the Philharmonic building (with statue of Manas – Fighter with Dragon – and a bust of an important *manaschi*), a municipal council and some universities (Kyrgyz State University, Bishkek Humanitarian University and Kyrgyz-Turkish University Manas). Extraordinarily, Kyrgyzstan celebrated 1,000 years of the Manas epos in 1995. Manas is extremely important in Kyrgyz culture. Even in 1946, during Soviet rule, Iskhak Razzakov, the chairman of the central committee of the Kyrgyzstan communist party, helped the government make plans for the 1100th anniversary of Manas. This initiative was introduced in Moscow with the announcement of a state prize for a text honouring the 'Big March', which is part of the epos, and for a 'Manas' opera.<sup>6</sup>

Among the myths, we can include also a version of the origin of the Kyrgyz ethnic group. Each ethnic group tends to be somehow anchored in history<sup>7</sup> and historical awareness belongs among the cornerstones of ethnic identity. In terms of construction of a nation, it is necessary to point out the significant role of historians, who 'create' their own histories of concrete nations. Then the wider population takes over the history and the evaluation of the historical events they submit. Historians are 'in the front line, because they produce more or less authorized versions of the past [ . . . ] for a wider audience'.<sup>8</sup>

In the newly independent states of the former USSR such historical constructs demonstrating the antiquity of nations were very common. In Turkmenistan the former president Niyazov submitted to his nation his prophecy book *Ruhnama* that was hailed *sacred (mukkades)*. According to *Ruhnama*, the first wheel was invented, of course, by the Turkmen. As well as the wheel, the Turkmen also invented white flour, the horse of Akhaltekin, and traditional national carpets. In Ukraine, where there arises a certain rivalry in using the Russian and Ukrainian languages, children learn in the schools that Ukrainian is 'one of the oldest world languages', in which 'also Ovidius wrote the poems'.<sup>9</sup> Another schoolbook author, S. Plachinda<sup>10</sup>, does not deal with antic and names Ukrainian directly as 'Sanskrit' and 'Great mother of all Indo-European languages'. The legendary Aryans were in fact the Ukrainians, who are marked by the authors modestly as the first farmers in the world, inventors of the wheel and plough. In Latvia, they do not want to link, for example, the heroic fights during World War II with the soviet Red Army. In the history schoolbook *History of Latvia. XX Century* is written: 'the Latvian legionnaires<sup>11</sup> were

distinguished during the fights by extraordinary persistence, skill and courage'. The concentration camps in Latvia (*salaspils*) and on the Latvian territory occupied by Germans are marked as 'working-corrective', and moreover, there were mainly 'criminals, deserters, tramps, Jews and similar ... in these camps'. According to the official Azerbaijani history, the first Azerbaijani was biblical Jafet, son of Noah, who alone was saved during the deluge. If we should believe all the mentioned historians, then the first Georgian was grandson of the first Azerbaijani. The legendary Georgian forefather Targamos should be a grandson of already mentioned biblical Jafet.

Creation of a new history was also very frequent in Kyrgyzstan. Before the ancient origin of the Kyrgyz nation began to be highlighted, it was believed the first written mention of the Kyrgyz was in AD 569, when Zemarkh, the envoy of the Byzantine emperor Justinian II, received a gift – a Kyrgyz slave.<sup>12</sup> This was according to the historians, who had a task to 'scientifically' support the ancientness of the Kyrgyz nation.<sup>13</sup> However, it is obvious that the roots of Kyrgyz statehood were already planted by the end of the third century BC, 22 centuries ago, and Kyrgyz statehood has since gone through many periods, including the long-term 'Yenisei' period<sup>14</sup> and the mighty imperial period, till it moved into the Ala-Too region (area of present day Kyrgyzstan). The first historical mention of the Kyrgyz (according to the newly created Kyrgyz history) was in 201 BC by Sima Qian<sup>15</sup> in the 'Historical Records' (Shiji): 'Later, when (Maodun/Mao dun) conquered the Chunyu, Cuyse, Dinli, *Gegun* and Sinli lands in the North, all important people of Siunn acknowledged him and gave him the name Maodun the Wise'.<sup>16</sup>

Later (in the 2000s) 201 BC was regarded not as the first mention of the Kyrgyz, but as the first year of the Kyrgyz statehood, and the 2,200-year anniversary was announced as 2003 by decree No. 184 of the president of the Kyrgyz Republic on 11 July 2002.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, from the oldest notes regarding the Kyrgyz it appears that the definite mention of the Kyrgyz ethnonym originates from the sixth century. There is a certain probability that there was already a relation between *Kyrgyz* and *Gegunese* by the second century BC and between *Kyrgyz* and *Khakases* since the sixth century AD, but a unique historical mention is missing. The Kyrgyz as an ethnic group were mentioned unambiguously in the time of Genghis Khan's rule (1162–1227), when their name replaced the former name *Khakas*.

Although we have more reliable references to settlement of Kyrgyz families from the fifteenth century, it is necessary to keep in mind that these Kyrgyz did not create a homogenous national unit; some families were again subjected by the Mongols in the sixteenth century, while other families kept their independence. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the lineage and tribal structure was more clearly formed, and this structure was retained in many places (mainly in the mountain areas) till the end of the twentieth century. The leader of each lineage was its representative, or *aksakal* (literally white-beard),<sup>18</sup> who took part in discussions and decisions within the framework of the whole tribe. The tribes (if they were not too big) also had heads called *manaps*.<sup>19</sup>

### **Food**

Concerning the livelihood of the Central Asian population, the Franciscan monk Giovanni di Plano Carpini (Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, or John of Plano Carpini) reports about his stay at the beginning of the thirteenth century:

They have big number of stock, mainly camels, cattle, sheep, goats and horses. The number of mares is so high as nowhere elsewhere. They have neither bred, nor vegetable, nor legumes, absolutely nothing except the meat; and they are eating too few of it that it could be enough for no one other. They are drinking much milk, mainly mares', but also cows', goats', sheep's and camels'. They do not have wine, beer or mead, only if other nations bring or give it to them. They are cooking millet in the water in winter, then they are doing a thin puree from it, they will drink one or two bottles of this puree, and then often do not eat anything for the whole day. Only in the evening they eat a piece of meat and drink a soup from it. In summer, when there is enough of mares' milk, they eat the meat a little bit, only if they receive or catch an animal or bird.<sup>20</sup>

The Kyrgyz cuisine was influenced by feeding behaviours of other cultures – Uzbeks and Tajiks in the south, Uyghurs, Dungans in the north and east and mainly Russians and Ukrainians in the north. We can see Chinese and Mongolian influences on the Kyrgyz in China – these are shown not only in the way they use chopsticks, but also in the side dishes. Whilst the Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan eat bread with each meal both at home and in restaurants, a habit they consider to be adopted from the Russians, this is not the custom of the Chinese Kyrgyz.

Wheat, and therefore bread too, was never traditionally part of the Kyrgyz diet. Capus (in 1890) states that even at the end of the nineteenth century bread was an absolute luxury.<sup>21</sup>

Today, vegetal products are still grown even in the traditionally nomadic areas. In places with favourable thermal conditions are grown tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and corn; in higher altitudes, it is possible to grow only barley and potatoes, garlic and onion.

There has obviously been a change to a greater variety of meals – only *beshparmak* and *katama* (pancakes baked in an oven) were prepared formerly, but the basis for the food was mainly the milky meals. Because corn was not grown in the nomadic areas, the flour was acquired on the markets in exchange for animals. After the growing of corn was developed, or when the corn was exchanged for animals, the portion of floury meals increased; examples are the white wheat bread and fried cakes, *katama*.<sup>22</sup>

Many respondents from northern Kyrgyzstan reported the Kyrgyz national cuisine and preparing meals as being an important part of their specific culture. They have a milky cuisine, and in this region, they produce *kumys*,<sup>23</sup> a holy Kyrgyz drink. Some Kyrgyz, however, do not produce *kumys*. This drink is not known amongst the Kyrgyz in China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Sometimes *uy-kumys* is produced from cow's milk; it has a similar thickness and taste to yoghurt diluted by water. Also *ayran* (yoghurt) is produced, from which is made *suzmō*. Whilst *suzmō* is not cooked in the north of Kyrgyzstan (here it is eaten raw), it is cooked in the south of the country or by the Kyrgyz in Pamir. From *suzmō*, after drying, originates *kurut*. *Kurut* is eaten by Kyrgyz children (also adults) in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, China and Afghanistan instead of sweets, but it may be used also for soup.

*Beshparmak* is one of the most famous Kyrgyz meals and is more prevalent in the northern part of country. It used to be regarded as a meal of Kazakh origin, but its preparation is different in some details; very wide noodles are used in Kazakhstan instead of the narrow noodles used in Kyrgyzstan. Another famous meal is *plov*, which is of Uzbek origin. It is more common in the south, but it is cooked in the

north as well. Like *kumys*, these dishes are for many Kyrgyz in China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan completely unknown.

*Maksym* is a drink that is prepared from roasted wheat: the hard parts are removed, hot water is poured over it, yeast is added and it is left to ferment till the next day. The popularity of this drink led to a company selling *Maxim Shoro* in cups on the streets of big cities in the north and south. The company entered also into China – for example in Kashgar, the local Kyrgyz and those who are in China only temporarily to work can be found congregating around a restaurant selling this drink.

### ***Wedding and the kalym***

Contracting marriage by Kyrgyz was primarily a property contract, and under some conditions (in the case of becoming a widow) a wife could become a part of her husband's property. In case of Kyrgyz, a woman after the death of her husband belonged to his younger brother, otherwise his uncle or other relative could enforce his title to a widow. A widow could go back to her parents only in the case of paying back the ransom for a bride – *kalym*. *Kalym* as a payment for a bride before marriage was and still is typical for all Kyrgyz.

If a widow had sons, she could reject another marriage and remain a widow for the rest of her life. She would live with her children in the *aul* (village) of her former husband. A young widow who had only daughters had to get married again and her new husband would adopt her children. A widow could get freedom only after the decision of representatives of her *aul* and after paying back the *kalym* to relatives of her dead husband. But a woman could not be perceived only as 'goods', because she did have (although often only partial) rights and she could very significantly intervene into the functioning of household and farm.

Preparation for marriage included especially an agreement between parents of a bride and groom. Previously, *kalym* had been paid to a whole family group, then to closer relatives and finally only to the bride's parents. Representatives of the aristocracy collected *kalym* as a form of taxes. We can find a reference to this also in the Kyrgyz national epos *Manas*, in which cattle for paying *kalym* for Khanikej, wife of Manas, is collected.

By the early twentieth century, engagements often took place when a boy or girl was not yet 10 years old. Sometimes, just after a birth of a child, parents knew who their daughter or son would marry. In the Suusamyr territory in northern Kyrgyzstan it was normal for marriage to be arranged for a girl only seven years' old and the groom's mother would give her earrings as a marriage confirmation. On this occasion, a *kalym* would also be arranged (a personal present for the bride's parents; social compensation that they will give up their daughter for a house of another family). In addition, a family would show what property it had – in what family their daughter would live. Poor Kyrgyz, who could not pay *kalym*, had single sons until the age of 30 or more years, while rich ones were marrying their sons at 16 years old.<sup>24</sup>

At the moment of paying *kalym*, the marriage contract was concluded. Escaping such a contract after paying *kalym* was very complicated and it did not only concern the woman and man and their families but all of their relatives. This was caused by the fact that often the whole family participated in paying *kalym*, and that is why a woman was considered the property of a whole family.



Although paying *kalym* is typical for all Kyrgyz, its original meaning has changed in different regions over time – greater importance is definitely attributed to the payment for a bride in southern parts of Kyrgyzstan.

In the south, there is very strict attention paid to the fact that the bride is a virgin. If it emerges that this is not the case, then the woman who prepared the bed informs the parents of the groom, and they may return the bride. The virginity of a bride is, of course, appreciated also in the north, but there are not such strict procedures for its verification. The age of bride is generally lower in the south – it is requested that the girl gets married at 19 or 20; if she is older, then she is *kara daly* (black back) and it is very difficult for her to get married. (At the beginning of the twentieth century girls used to marry at the ages of 14 to 16).

Sometimes it is possible to see in the south also instances of polygyny or bigamy (this almost never appears in the northern regions). In cases, when a man has two women, each of them has a separate house and they educate the children separately too.

In Chuy Province (northern Kyrgyzstan) the lowest *kalym* is paid (only about 15 thousands soms, or less than US\$400;<sup>25</sup> the sum is higher in the countryside). The girls and boys often get married voluntarily, without considerable influence from the parents. In contrast, *kalym* for the girls from Talas is believed to be the highest in Kyrgyzstan at an average of 80,000 soms (more than US\$2,000).<sup>26</sup>

The patriarchal habits in the Kyrgyz families are much more obvious in the south than in the north. A very typical habit of the Kyrgyz from Issyk-Kul (in the north) remains bowing to the parents of the husband. This habit, as manifestation of respect to the parents of the husband, is known also in other areas, but here it is the most common; it belongs to the daily habits and is done till the death of the parents of husband (contrary to, for example, Suusamyr or Chuy Province in northern Kyrgyzstan, where the bride bows to the parents of her husband only for a certain time after her wedding).

Changes in the understanding of the traditions can be demonstrated by looking at the customs in Bishkek.<sup>27</sup> While the payment for the bride in herdsmen society had real importance as compensation from the groom's family to the bride's family, in Bishkek, the *kalym* is understood more and more only as a symbolic act and is sometimes not even paid in cash. Typically, relatives of the groom give the bride's parents a bag of corn or a ram instead of a real *kalym*, which used to be much higher (and remains much higher in the village areas, especially in the southern provinces).

In the Kyrgyz villages in China, first a horse is given, and then tribute to the parents of the bride. This is equal to approximately US\$1,000 in the case of farmers, but it can reach as high as US\$5,000 in the case of well-off families.<sup>28</sup> Formerly, in the Kyrgyz areas of Tajikistan, marriages were agreed upon only between the parents, and a very high *kalym* was paid for the bride – 3 yaks, 30 rams and 30,000 Kyrgyz soms on average. The Tajik president, President Rachmonov, intervened in the matter of Kyrgyz marriages and energetically encouraged them to allow lower *kalym*s. Now, pursuant to this is a special law passed in 2007<sup>29</sup> that, in addition to addressing the number of cattle to be killed during funerals and other social events, stipulates the maximum amount of *kalym* one third of the former value – 1 yak, 10 rams and 10,000 Kyrgyz soms (approximately 1,060 Tajik somoni).<sup>30</sup>

### **Religion**

Even in tsarist Russia, the population in the territory of today's Kyrgyzstan (and in the whole territory of Russian Turkestan) was noticeably divided according to religion: Christians and Muslims. Consequently, this division showed in the culture: for example, the Kyrgyz used a different calendar (*shamsyja*), containing only 354 days. Although a new 'Soviet' identity was created after the revolution, this Soviet identity kept many original cultural specifics, including different religious traditions. Graveyards in all Central Asian cities reveal this fact very clearly. The Soviet population had Christian graveyards, where the Slavs (Europeans) were buried, and Muslim graveyards, where people native to that region were buried.

Under the thumb of the Soviet Union, religion was suppressed and played only a marginal role. It was limited to the basic ceremonies only, such as circumcision of boys and acts that were not understood as religious by the majority: for example, 'omin' (*omen*)<sup>31</sup> after finishing a dish. After the collapse of the USSR and the establishment of independent Central Asian states, not only did national questions arise, but also religious questions. The process of democratisation, destroying the totalitarian society and gaining the independence and sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan, caused the people to become more interested in their long-suppressed religious and spiritual values. In the first phase of reconstruction, there was a national revival of old, Kyrgyz-specific feasts, habits, rituals and traditions. The Muslim tradition still had very deep roots in Kyrgyzstan. Religious affiliation began to play a bigger and bigger role, becoming more and more connected with national affiliation. The Muslims in Kyrgyzstan itself (similar to other Central Asian republics) gradually gained an independent *muftiat*,<sup>32</sup> and the Orthodox Church in Kyrgyzstan (as well as in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) stayed, via the Tashkent and Central Asian eparchy, subordinated to Moscow (to the Patriarch of Moscow and of the whole Rus). The linkage of religion with a nation is sometimes very close, sometimes not. In the case of the Muslim south of Kyrgyzstan, we cannot forget that the Islamic religion is not necessarily a link between different ethnicities. This was shown, for example, by bloody conflicts between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the cities Osh and Uzgen in 1990; the same religious affiliation did not prevent the ethnic conflict.

Many respondents in the north are obviously searching for new roots. They absolutely do not consider the Soviet era negatively, and after dissolution of the union, they accepted, for a short time, the model highlighting the Muslim tradition. However, although they acknowledge the positive role of religion, they do not accept Islam as a religion that should be an integral part of their lives. Many respondents in the Muslim south mentioned that in the Soviet times, Islam surely was not a fixed part of their lives, but it was limited only to some external demonstrations and habits. After a resurgence of Muslim traditions, they have tried to participate more actively in religious life and have also started leading their children to Islam. In these cases, acceptance of Muslim traditions will be a relatively long process accompanied by cooling of the original religious enthusiasm, which is already obvious in many places.

According to information from October 2008, there were 1,886 mosques in Kyrgyzstan (approximately 1,500 in 2006), equalling the number of schools.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, religious schools have been constructed, which supplements the number of mosques. In Kyrgyzstan, there are eight active Islamic universities and 71 *madras* (religious schools), mostly in the South.<sup>34</sup> In this context, there is an apparent caution from local authorities and governments afraid of increasing the influence of radical Islamists coming from abroad and working in these schools. Additionally,

the local Muslim authorities are also afraid of an increased influence of radical groups and already, in 2002, started to conduct religious censorship. An expert commission founded by the Spiritual Administration of Kyrgyz Muslims (DUMK/DUMK/ДУМК) examines all Islamic literature and manages the building of new mosques. Until that time, nobody had exact data on the number of mosques, and no one was able to intervene in the learning programmes in madras.<sup>35</sup>

### Kyrgyz in Afghanistan

In the Pamir Mountains (especially in today's Tajikistan, which directly borders Afghanistan), the Kyrgyz population has lived since the eighteenth century. According to the French specialist on Turkey, Rémi Dor,<sup>36</sup> the Tejit and Kesek lineages of the Kyrgyz moved to the Pamir Mountains from the territory of today's Kyrgyzstan. The Tejit lineage was first to Pamir (in the eighteenth century) and chose the best pastures. It travelled through the Kyzyl-art mountain pass, Alay Valley and along the Ak-su River. They moved to the area of today's Tajikistan in beginning of the nineteenth century, to escape the influence of Mohamed Ali who conquered the Karategin region in 1834 (an historic designation for part of the former Bukharian emirate ruled by a separate *beg*).

A captain in the Russian army, B.L. Grombchevskij, travelled through Karategin at the end of the nineteenth century and recorded his experience with the Kyrgyz in that region:

The area of Karategin is something like prolongation of the valley of Alay and it is located on both sides of the Surch-Oba River. The population are partially Kyrgyz and partially Tajiks. The Tajiks from eastern Karategin that took over the Kyrgyz habits are living in houses and in the villages only during the winter, in the summer, they are living a nomadic way of life in mountains, where they are grazing their cattle. Karategin is a poor place, but it has enough of suitable land for cropping and also rich pastures on the northern hillsides of the Peter the Big Mountains.<sup>37</sup>

Stein<sup>38</sup> mentions the Kyrgyz from Karategin in his short expedition report. He found it interesting how the 'old Kyrgyz raiders are gradually pushed out from this area by the settled Tajiks'. In Karategin, in today's Zhergetal rayon in Tajikistan, there are about 50,000 Kyrgyz.

The Kesek lineage crossed over Darvaza and Shugnan to Big Pamir and the Alichur region. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Tejit lineage searched for places with less snow in the winter and resettled in the Rang Kul (present-day Tajikistan) and Small Pamir areas. In addition to the Tejit and Kesek lineages, members of the Kypchak and Pamir lineages lived in Pamir. The Pamir lineage was fully independent till 1876, when they became part of Russia, but even then, they did not pay the land tax. In the 1880s, the standard of living of the Pamir Kyrgyz worsened in connection to the competition between England and Russia over control of this area. After creating the Wakhan Corridor, the population was divided into two parts; one was part of Russia, but the second fell under the Afghan administration.

Civil war in Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s, and the confused and chaotic first years of the Soviet Union, drove families, represented by Rachmankul-khan (person's name is Rachmankul, *khan* is the title), across the southern border to Afghanistan. These Kyrgyz settled in the Wakhan Corridor. The Rachmankul-

khan lineage owned hereditary pastures and houses in eastern (Chinese) Turkestan, relatively far to the east (near the city Ürümchi/Urumsqi). Many members of the Rachmankul-khan lineage (also Rachmankul-khan himself) spent several years in Chinese Turkestan after fleeing the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The 1920s could be regarded as the start of the Kyrgyz settlement of the Afghan Pamir. The Kyrgyz left Chinese Turkestan with their herds to go to Afghanistan and Rachmankul-khan, as owner of many thousands of cattle, became one of the richest local Afghani heads. The Afghani king Muhammad Zahir Shah granted all possible help to the Kyrgyz. He declared that the Kyrgyz must not serve in the Afghani army and granted them the status of a nation that guards the state border, the same as the official border guards. Furthermore, the bred animals tax (tithe) was cancelled under his rule. The king's family granted the title *Pasbani Pamir* (Guard of Pamir) to Rachmankul-khan for his merit as the guard of the northeastern border of the country.

In 1971, approximately 3,000 Kyrgyz lived in Afghanistan, and the majority of them lived in Small Pamir, with 1,800 in the Wakhan Corridor.<sup>39</sup> Mainly, the area's population was from the Tejit lineage, but there were also a few families from the Kesek lineage, eight from the Kalmak and Naiman lineages and two from the Kypchak lineage. The Big Pamir was populated mainly by members of the Kesek lineage and small lineages related to the Kesek lineage; e.g. Kyzylayak, Zhikzhim and Mamachar. From a demographic point of view, a high rate of child mortality was typical for these Kyrgyz, caused by insufficient food to arm them with essential nutrients and vitamins to battle the harsh climate. The high child mortality rate affected both the poor and the wealthy.

After the revolution in 1973, when Afghanistan was declared a republic, the situation of the Afghani Kyrgyz grew considerably worse. The former king's favourite, Rachmankul-khan, had much worse relationships with the new regime. When the 1973 regime was removed by another revolution in 1978 (the 'April Revolution'), the situation in Afghanistan became still worse. The instability was further deepened by the interference of United States and, later, by the Soviet Union, too. Therefore, that year, Rachmankul-khan took the Wakhan Kyrgyz to northern Kashmir. During this movement, the Kyrgyz lost a large number of cattle and some of the Kyrgyz became ill because of the different climate. Rachmankul-khan turned to the US government, requesting it to permit emigration to Alaska. This request was never answered, but in March 1982, Turkey permitted the migration of these Kyrgyz to eastern Anatolia. Rachmankul-khan himself died in 1990 in Turkey. Approximately 50 Kyrgyz families from northern Kashmir, with their head Abdurashid-khan, came back in the 1980s to Afghani Pamir.

It is possible to see some original cultural features of the Afghani Kyrgyz, e.g. in the *yurt*<sup>40</sup> decoration and the songs that are sung not only during feasts, but also at funerals. Famous singers are hired to sing the funeral songs, *koshok*. In Kyrgyzstan the *koshok* are sung during funerals, but they are sung by relatives of the deceased, whilst in Afghanistan strangers are hired to sing the songs. Typically, the singers come from the poorer classes because the wealthy consider it disgraceful to sing in public. Among the Pamir inhabitants, there is a widespread production of plays, mainly in the spring and summer. Mainly the plays are well-known Kyrgyzstan plays, such as Besh-tash, Ashyk-atmay, Kurosh, Buka-tartysh and Arkan-tartysh.<sup>41</sup>

### *Wakhan*

The Wakhan Corridor originated at the end of nineteenth century as a buffer zone between two powers: Russia and Great Britain. The border was demarcated according to a few agreements in the period 1873 to 1981.<sup>42</sup>

The Wakhan Corridor spreads out from the Afghani Ishkashim up to the Vachshir mountain pass (Vakhjir Dawan) in the east near the Chinese border. The distance from Ishkashim to the most eastern part of the Wakhan Corridor is 350 km and to the Vachshir mountain pass 300 km. The corridor is widest (65 km) in its middle; in the western entry, it is only 18 km. The average altitude of mountains around the Wakhan valleys is 5,450 m.

There are two different regions in the Wakhan Corridor: Big Pamir and Small Pamir. The Big Pamir is an approximately 60-km long mountain range oriented from the east to the west. The Small Pamir, roughly 100 km long, is separated from the more southern Big Pamir by Wakhan range (see Figure 2). The Big Pamir has an average population density of 2.6 inh./km<sup>2</sup>, whilst the Small Pamir 3.17 inh./km<sup>2</sup>.

The passes connecting the Big and Small Pamir are mostly passable only in summer and the beginning of autumn, which has a great influence on business

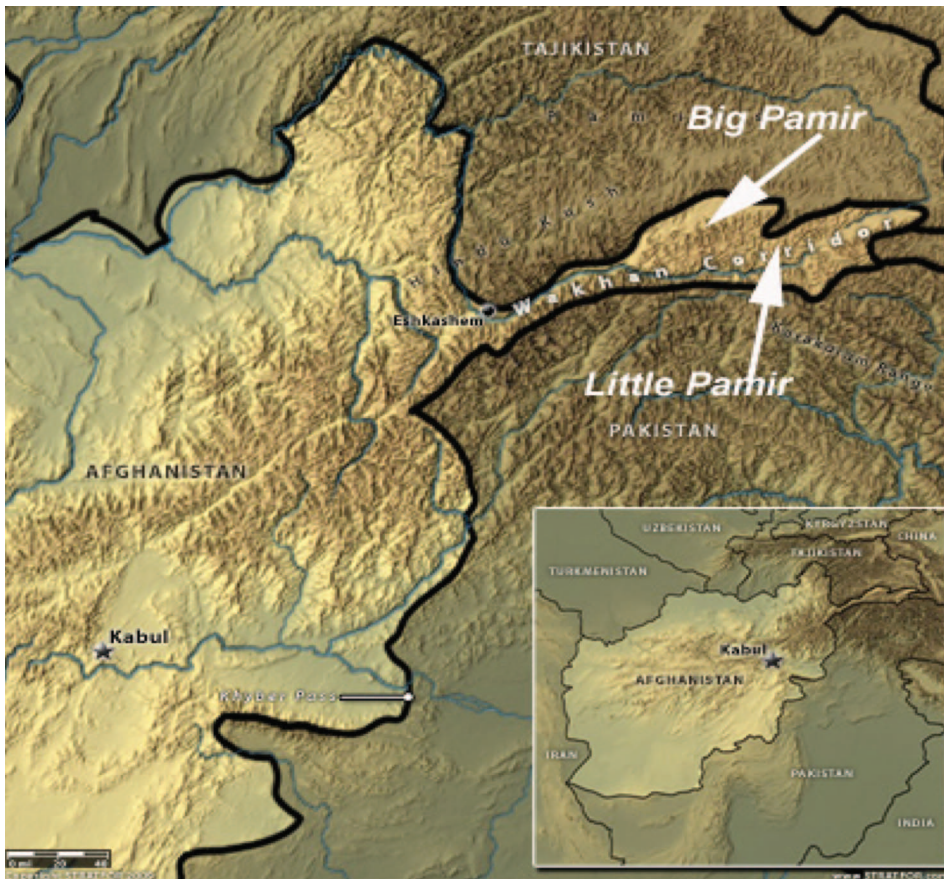


Figure 2. Wakhan Corridor.

contacts and mutual relationships. The Kyrgyz population is thus divided geographically (and also economically) into two groups. Both groups fully depend on markets to purchase almost all products, including corn, horses, and opium. Actually, trade is conducted either in bazaars or by businessmen who go to the Kyrgyz with their goods. The businessmen's prices, however, are considerably higher, often up to triple the price of bazaars. The entire value of the goods is expressed by the number of sheep or cattle. According to Kreutzmann and Felmy, the Pamir pastures are not sufficiently utilised. They compared the number of animals in the mid-1970s and in 1999 and found that only 22.9% of the original sheep and goats, 40.2% of the yaks and half of the original number of horses remained. Only the number of camels had increased (by 9.6%).<sup>43</sup>

The Kyrgyz from Big Pamir conduct business with herdsmen, farmers or other businessmen from other valleys besides the Wakhan border, the majority of which are Tajiks. The Kyrgyz from Small Pamir, on the other hand, conduct business with cross-border regions of Pakistan. Illegal border crossings are tolerated both by Afghani and Pakistani border guards. Until recently, they were able to trade with Tajikistan, but the bazaars disappeared quickly after 2005, when the Russian troops left that protected the border. There are only two times a day that one can legally cross the Tajik–Afghani border. Thanks to the broader business opportunities, the Kyrgyz in Small Pamir are substantially better off than those in Big Pamir.

Mauri visited the Kyrgyz of Wakhan in the 1970s, and met their head Rachmankul-khan. He considers the territory where the Kyrgyz are living as the last stable settled place in Wakhan Sarchad.<sup>44</sup> From there, there begins really inhospitable land. He considers the local Kyrgyz to be descendants of the nomads that accompanied Genghis Khan and did not accept any borders in the past. Now, however, this ancient nation is divided by this border into three parts: three thousand in Afghanistan, three million in the Soviet Union and one million in China. These groups, though, do not maintain any contacts amongst themselves. The leader of the Afghani Kyrgyz, disseminated in hundreds of *kishlaks*<sup>45</sup> of Pamir, is *hadj*<sup>46</sup> Rachmankul-khan.

On these summer pasturages – he told – we are living roughly thirty persons, a big patriarchal family. I have two wives and ten children. The oldest is forty years old and the youngest is three years old.

We Kyrgyz are the cattle herdsmen. Once, we had rich pasturages and arable land too. Here, in Afghanistan, there is only one pasturage and the life is harder here, because there is not so much rain as in the past. The name if this place is Targan-Kurun, it means 'pasturages without stones', because we have cleared it ourselves.<sup>47</sup>

Three thousand Afghani Kyrgyz breed sheep, goats and yaks. The yak is an irreplaceable animal for the local Kyrgyz. Its dung, *kizjak*, is their only fuel. The yak provides milk, fur for the production of string and clothing and leather. Brooms are produced from tail hairs. Moreover, the yak is an excellent carrier of loads; one can carry 80 kg, easily climbing the ice over 5,000 m above sea level. Milking yaks and goats is women's work and is done twice a day, at sunrise and sunset. The Kyrgyz also hunt using Russian and Chinese weapons. They hunt mountain goats and wild sheep that are called the 'sheep of Marco Polo'.<sup>48</sup> The only dwellings of the Kyrgyz are yurts. In the summer, the Kyrgyz eat mainly milk, mutton and yak meat, and in the winter, they also eat bread with meat. To

obtain tea, sugar, corn, some parts of clothing and other important things, the Kyrgyz must trade with Wakhi people.<sup>49</sup> Earlier, the Afghani Kyrgyz purchased most of their goods in the Chinese Kashgar, but political events in China severed the business contacts with Kashgar. Now, the inhabitants must go down to Wakhan. Although long-time conflicts exist, both ethnic groups depend on each other.<sup>50</sup>

Although the area of Big Pamir is 5,500 km<sup>2</sup>, the Kyrgyz live on only 1,550 km<sup>2</sup>. The remainder of the territory is claimed by the Wakhan people for farming and breeding animals.<sup>51</sup> The precipitation and predominating winds in Wakhan are influenced by the area relief. In altitudes over 5,000 m, there is perpetual snow. The wind blows primarily from the west; therefore, the windward sides of the valley are typically without snow but are extremely cold. The Kyrgyz migrate to find pastures in short trips, usually less than 20 km. The migration direction is from the summer pasturages (*djailo*) on the northern hillsides (*terskej*) to the winter pasturages (*keshrou*) on the southern hillsides (*kungej*).

The pasturages are private, and the Kyrgyz make a great effort to improve their posts. Because they spend a significantly longer time on the wintering places (eight months), more buildings are found here.<sup>52</sup> The houses are equipped with all the necessities; of course, even the TV is not missing. They enjoy watching satellite programs from Kyrgyzstan.

An important part of Afghan Kyrgyz life is Islam. An Afghan Kyrgyz every day prays *namaz*. There are no schools here, so education is conducted only at home.<sup>53</sup> The Kyrgyz only marry within the Kyrgyz group, and typically, the bride is very young, 13 years or less. Given the small size of the population, marriages between cousins and polygamy (polygyny) are also common. Whilst marriages to cousins are unthinkable to Kyrgyzstani Kyrgyz, they are, on the contrary, preferred by Afghani Kyrgyz and by the Wakhi people.<sup>54</sup>

The population density of the Kyrgyz is much lower in the wintering places, because there are fewer pasture possibilities. Contrastingly, in summer, the individual groups of herdsmen can easily join together. According to the information from 1970s, on the summer pasturages there were 86 bigger groups (*aul*) created by 3–12 families (*oj*), whilst in the summer, there were 118 aul with 1–7 *oj*.<sup>55</sup>

Afghani Kyrgyz suffer from a horribly high child mortality rate: for every 1,000 births, 520 die before age five years. Furthermore, 4% of women die in connection to childbirth. The probability of death during childbirth for a Kyrgyz woman is about 1:3 in comparison with a probability of 1:6 for all women in Afghanistan. Although the local Kyrgyz do not drink alcohol, there is a big problem with the wide use of opium. The opium is supplied to the local inhabitants mainly by the Tajiks from lower Badakhshan. Money that could be spent for improving the economy ends up in the pockets of smugglers and local heads. Moreover, the use of opium deteriorates the already bad health of the local population.<sup>56</sup>

### *Shuoldara*<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the Wakhan, approximately thirty Kyrgyz live near the district town Ishkashim in a small village called Shuoldara (see Figures 3, 4, 5).

All Kyrgyz in Shuoldara are the descendants of two brothers, whose father migrated to Pamir (Wakhan) from Chinese Kashgar (see Figure 6). Both brothers were born and got married in Kashgar. Subsequently, they set out for Shuoldara. At



Figures 3 and 4. Shuoldara and Environs.



Figure 5. Shuoldara – satellite photo.  
Source: ©2008 Terra Metrics.

that time, it was a beautiful green place, good for cattle grazing. Now, because of drought the situation is much worse, deteriorating more each year. After arriving in Shuoldara, the members of both families dwelled in only two yurts that they brought



from Kashgar. The descendants still use one of them on the summer pastures. The second is retained as a keepsake. The walled houses were built by the sons of the first settlers.

In 2008, the oldest inhabitant in Shuoldara was Gulbibibi, a widow of one of the brothers (Abdylaziz). Just like everyone else, she does not know her age. When she moved to Shuoldara with her husband, she was around 20 years old. 'Today, I am 80, but I do not know it exactly. Maybe I am 60'. One of the farmers, Orozmamat, arrived in Shuoldara from Afghani Pamir and married one of the daughters of the first settlers. He estimated his age to be 40 years. Orozmamat lost contact with his sister Aynisa during the relocation of a part of the Kyrgyz to Turkey. She was married and her husband served in the army. Another man, Kotcho, stole her before the move to Turkey and departed with her to Turkey. Since then, he has not had any messages about her.

### **Lifestyle of Afghan Kyrgyz<sup>58</sup>**

#### ***Weddings***

Afghani Kyrgyz follow the typical tradition of the *kalym* (a smaller value than in Kyrgyzstan). *Kalym* is not paid in money, but only in kind – mainly in sheep.

The grandmother, Gulbibibi, stated that when she got married, her family was paid one camel and 30 sheep. The parents select the couples for marriage, and they choose the name of grandchild, too, mostly according to the Koran. Previously, the mullah read from the Koran, but after his death, his nephew Kудayberdy took over this task, as he is the most educated. It is common that a wedding is agreed between cousins, but it is absolutely unthinkable to get married to an Afghani woman. (Message from Gulbibibi from Shuoldara in the year 2008).

#### ***Religious expressions***

The Kyrgyz are Sunni Muslims, so they have assumed a relatively strong negative attitude toward the Ismailis who inhabit the village. The Kyrgyz have a mosque, whilst the Ismailis meet for prayers and some ceremonies in a private house. The cemetery is also separated. The relationships between the Muslim groups are peaceful; for example, the helper on the farm is an Ismaili. With religion comes feasts and celebrations. Amongst the biggest feasts is the *Noruz*.<sup>59</sup> *Orozo ait*<sup>60</sup> is also sometimes practiced or when a boy is circumcised.

#### ***Changes***

The local Kyrgyz describe the changes that are taking place in their lives and that they consider the most considerable.

Formerly, a woman would not call her husband's relatives by their first names. Now, allegedly, this prohibition is not so strictly respected. (During the dictating of the relatives, Gulbibibi refused to say the name of her husband and his father, but then she said: 'after all, they are dead anyway, so perhaps I could say it').

Another change that has occurred is the shrouding of women. Whilst it was formerly absolutely unthinkable that a woman would uncover any part of her body, now, the Kyrgyz women are not so shrouded.

Shite bread in the form of flat cake and salty tea with milk, cooked and seasoned rice, is a common food, and *manty* and *plov* are favoured and eaten with by hand. They use

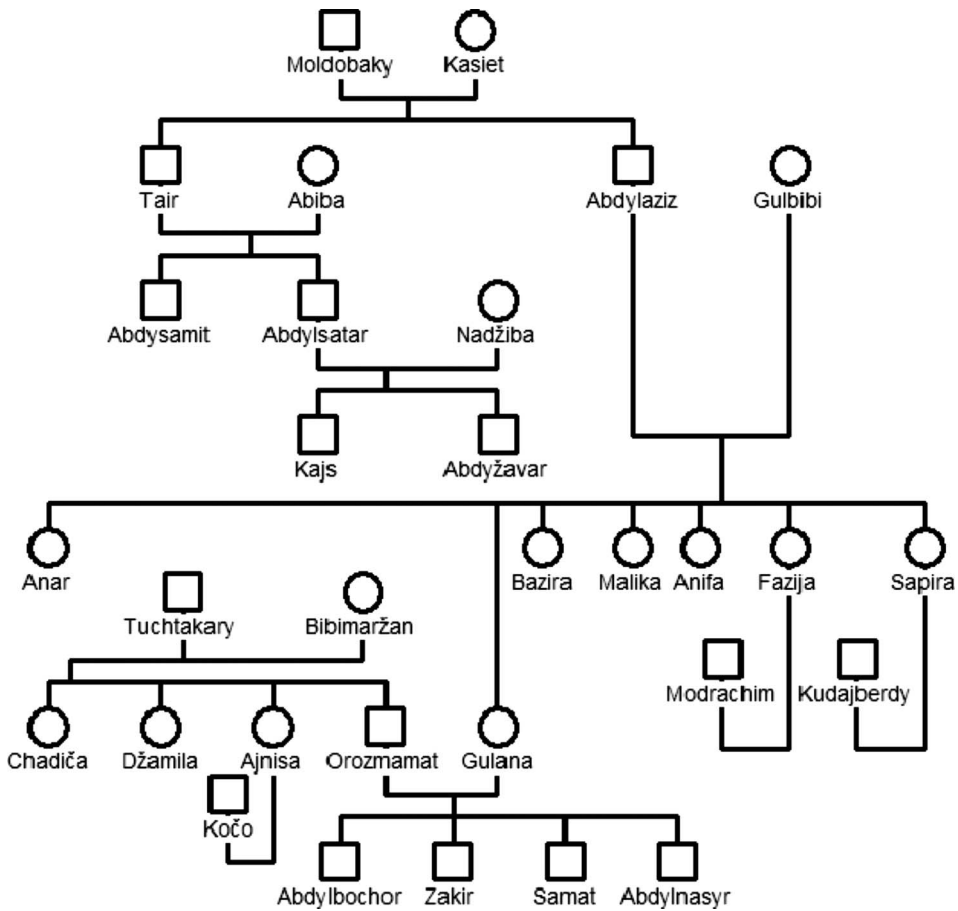


Figure 6. Family tree of the Kyrgyz in Afghani Shuoldara.

goat's milk, too, from which they make *kurut*, but it is cooked and formed into slices (see Figure 7).

**Relationships with the Kyrgyz from Wakhan**

The Kyrgyz living in Wakhan and Shuoldara maintain relationships because the Kyrgyz from Wakhan sometimes go to the market in the district city, Ishkashim. All Afghani Kyrgyz have a common head. Their order, since the end of the nineteenth century, is mentioned by Kubatov:

Odzhaly-khan from Kutal lineage, till 1875; Kozubay-khan, from Kyzyl-ayak lineage, till 1905; Mamatkerim-khan, from Alapa lineage, till 1938; Tolubay-khan, from Kyzyl bash lineage, till 1950. The most important was surely Rachmankul-khan (Kochkor lineage), who took the Afghani Kyrgyz to Pakistan and then to Turkey, with part of the Kyrgyz returning with Abdurashid-khan (Shajym lineage).<sup>61</sup>

The Kyrgyz in Shuoldara mentioned that after Abdurashid-khan became the Kyrgyz leader Moloraim, Turduyochun Adjo Bakil became the local leader. His



Figure 7. Kurut at Afghani Kyrgyz. Shuoldara, 2008.

deputy is Kudayberdy from Shuoldara. If any problems appear, the leader may solve them by his authority. At the same time, he is also the mediator between the Kyrgyz and the central Afghani government. It is necessary to mention that the Afghani Kyrgyz do not have, generally speaking, any awareness of the central government. Concerning the political situation in Afghanistan, they are without a decided opinion, concluding from the answer of Orozmamat:

What is name of our president? I do not know, and I do not know the name of the previous. What is he like? I cannot say, but I have spoken with the teacher, and he said that they gat a raise, thus, maybe he would be good. (Message from Orozmamat from Shuoldara in the year 2008).

From Shuoldara, the school is approximately two hours away through the mountains, so the boys have to set off about at five in the morning for the journey. The girls cannot sleep in either because there is a lot of work on the farm in the morning, but they must not go to school – it is only for the boys. The lessons are taught in Farsi, and the parents do not consider school attendance to be too important. The language surely does not play any role in this point of view. Anyway, after 20 years the boys stay at home, and allegedly, what they learned in the school will not apply on the farm.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Creation of the national state in Kyrgyzstan had a significant influence on the national awareness of the Kyrgyz. It aroused an interest in the history of the Kyrgyz people. Historical constructs were presented to the population regarding the ancientness and certain exclusivity of the Kyrgyz ethnic group. This change in the understanding of traditions started after the USSR's disintegration. Ancient Kyrgyz traditions existed that were tested by many hundreds of years of history, but in

reality, the traditions from immediately before the October Revolution in 1917 have been emphasized, which are refused by many people. The reason is a connection of this period with the time of feudalism and the rule of *bays* and *manaps*. Although these traditions are entering unnoticeably into family ceremonies (mainly by TV and radio), many traditions, mainly religious, were rediscovered, and new traditions were simultaneously created. Kyrgyz in north and south of Kyrgyzstan manifested different degrees of adherence to traditions. There is also the obvious different orientation of foreign economic partners between the northern and southern parts of the country. While the north of Kyrgyzstan is connected to Kazakhstan and Russia very closely, the southern part tended always to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is necessary to keep in mind that the southern part produces the majority of electrical energy, non-ferrous metals, electrical components and a wide spectrum of agricultural produces – not only the articles of the food industry, but also silk and cotton.

The differences manifest themselves in many areas of life – from different dialects to very different ways of life. Southern families have a more apparent patriarchal structure. Women are on formal terms with their husbands; children are on formal terms with their parents. In the north these habits are also visible, but they are gradually disappearing. The differences between the north and the south of the country also show in the number of divorces. The divorce rate in Kyrgyzstan (in 2009) stood at 16%. An above-average divorce rate can be found in the two biggest Kyrgyz cities – in the Capital City Bishkek (30%) and in the south in Osh (22%). All areas in the south have a very low divorce rate – Osh territory (7%), Jalalabad and Batken territory (10%). In the northern part of the country, only the mainly rural Naryn and Talas have a low divorce rate (11%); the territory Issyk-kul has a divorce rate of 17% and the Chuy territory around the Capital City has a divorce rate of 28%.<sup>62</sup>

Although the south of Kyrgyzstan used to be marked as substantially more religious, the keeping of religious traditions (and an active religious life) is very half-hearted in both parts of the country. Even when the importance of religion is increased in the lives of people both in the north and south, its role is not too significant.

The habits connected with closing the marriage are very similar for Kyrgyz in all investigated areas. Although the total payment for the bride varies, the *kalym* is a linking element for all Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

In the Afghan Kyrgyz, we can see that some of these customs are still firmly fixed, but even with them, there is some change. There are differences, however, with selecting the bride. Whilst the majority of Kyrgyz expect to marry outside their own lineage, or at least their own sub-lineage, Afghani Kyrgyz prefer marriages between cousins. The level of intervention by parents into the selection of the partner relates directly to the level of maintaining the traditions. The lowest level of intervention is in northern Kyrgyzstan. Intervention is significantly higher in the south, but the highest amount of intervention is found amongst the Afghani Kyrgyz.

The traditions connected to eating habits are essentially influenced by the environment. What is regarded as a national food by some Kyrgyz is not known by other Kyrgyz. The production and drinking of fermented mare milk *kumys* is typical for northern Kyrgyzstan but only for a smaller part of the south. This tradition is not followed in China, Afghanistan or Tajikistan. Only the production of *kurut* – dried yoghurt (the principle is roughly the same, but differs as to whether the material is cooked or not; the Afghan Kyrgyz produce *kurut* from goat's milk, too) is common for all Kyrgyz. Also, drinking tea may show an adaptation to the environment. In northern Kyrgyzstan, they usually drink black tea, while in the south, they drink

green tea. The Chinese and Afghan Kyrgyz drink salty tea with milk and butter (similar to the Kyrgyz Alay).

According to the research, it is obvious that the biggest impact on cultural change has been state interventions. The interventions of states in the territory of the former USSR led to near-abandonment of religious life. Only to a limited degree did external demonstrations remain. In Afghanistan, where the state did not influence religious life, all demonstrations of religious life remain.

A relatively high historical awareness of membership in the Kyrgyz nation is common for all Kyrgyz in all investigated areas. This perception is not bound to the language. Some Kyrgyz in China speak Kazakh (from the mountains of Tarbagatai), while others speak Tajik, but a single ethnic identity is common to them all. The perception of common identity is not bound even to a single mythical ancestor. The cult of Manas is almost non-existent in Tajik, Afghan and Chinese Kyrgyz culture from the Kashgar surroundings.

All Kyrgyz living beyond the Kyrgyzstan border perceive very similarly the creation of a national state. It is a symbol of national identity for them, to which they look with a certain respect. Whilst during the Soviet era, these Kyrgyz did not use the symbols of the union's republic (the awareness of Kirgiz SSR was definitely overshadowed by the perception of the whole USSR), today, these Kyrgyz abroad show, by the state symbols of Kyrgyzstan (flag, emblem), their sense of unity with this state. Kyrgyzstan is deemed in this connection, both by the Kyrgyz and by the Kyrgyzstan representatives, as their 'historical fatherland'. The Afghani Kyrgyz, who usually do not know the Kyrgyzstan state symbols, express the desire to visit Kyrgyzstan, a country where they can feel at home. They absolutely do not mind that this historical fatherland was created by a political decision in the 1930s and, in many places, by very unnaturally demarcated borders. What is more important is the existence of a Kyrgyz state that, already by its name, offers a certain affinity to the Kyrgyz living outside its borders.

### Notes on contributor

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### Notes

1. Kyrgyzstan is a former Soviet Republic located in Central Asia.
2. Paksoy, "Observations among Kirghiz refugees."
3. A heroic epos from more distinct geographical regions of Turkestan territory, known by many Turkic nations (Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Bashkirs, Tatars) and by Tajiks. Its final version stabilised in the fourteenth to seventeenth century (according to the *Big Soviet Encyclopaedia*). In the Soviet Union the epos was issued in 1939, 1941, 1949, 1957, 1958 and 1961. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan tried to declare the epos as Uzbek – based on the Uzbek claim, the year 1999 was declared by UNESCO as the Year of Thousandth Anniversary of the Alpamysh epos.

4. Callahan, *The Kyrgyz of the Afghan Pamir Ride On*.
5. Kreutzmann and Felmy, "Wakhan Woluswali in Badakhshan."
6. Kokaisl and Pargač, *Pastevecká společnost v proměnách času*, 202.
7. Strauss, *Miroirs et masques*, 173.
8. Hartog and Revel, *Les usages politiques du passé*, 16.
9. Gnatkevitch, *Ukrajins'ka mova dlya pochatkivciv* [Ukrainian for beginners].
10. Plachinda, *Slovnyk давн'oukrajins'koji mifolohiji* [Dictionary of ancient Ukrainian mythologies].
11. Part of the German Nazi SS.
12. "Istorija Kirgizstana."
13. Alimbekov, *2200 let etnonima Kyrgyz'*.
14. The area around the river Yenisey, present-day Russia.
15. 司馬遷, Sima Qian (transcription pinyin) – Chinese historian, hereditary historiographer of the Han dynasty, writer and astronomer. He was born between 145 and 135 BC and died somewhere around 90 BC. He is known mainly for his grandiose work *Shiji* (史記), where he summarizes the Chinese history from mythic forefathers till the present time.
16. Karaev and Zhusupov, *Kyrgyzy*, 2–5 emphasis added.
17. Ukaz Prezidenta KR, *O provedenii Goda kyrgyzskoj gosudarstvennosti*.
18. The term came to mean an elected village elder, as well as any respected man.
19. *Manaps* were the representatives of Kyrgyz feudal lineage aristocracy. The lineage members gave them juridical right and command in a time of military conflicts. This institution existed mainly in the families in the territory of today's northern Kyrgyzstan, in the beginning of nineteenth century, and the denomination and related advantages were inherited. The richest *manaps* had huge flocks and big areas of pastures. At the end of nineteenth century, a new influential group of *bays* (although it is not precise, we could use the term *landowner*) appeared, and the *manaps* lost their influence. Most of the lineage members were essentially slaves of *manaps* that supported the tsar regime. The institution of *manaps* was cancelled during the Soviet rule in the later part of the twentieth century. (Manapy, *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*).
20. Carpini, *Putování k Mongolům*, chapter 19.
21. Bliss, *Social and Economic Change*, 202.
22. Kokaisl and Kokaislová, *Kyrgyzstan*, 94–7.
23. *Kumys* (or *koumiss*) is fermented dairy product traditionally made from mare's milk.
24. Ploskih, *Nash Kyrgyzstan*.
25. 15,000 KGS = 318 USD = 200 GBP = 225 € (in 2010).
26. Message from respondents from Suisamy village (\*1955, male) and from Talas (\*1967, female) in Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2009).
27. Derbisheva, "Obrjady i ritualy v kyrgyzskoj kul'ture."
28. Message from Kyrgyz respondents from Kashgar county in China (2005, 2006).
29. Law concerning the arrangement of traditions and ceremonies (закон „Об упорядочении традиций и обрядов“).
30. Message from Kyrgyz respondents from Rangkul village in Tajikistan (2008).
31. A prayer of thanks.
32. Dуховное управление мусульман Кыргызстана – ДУМК КР/ДУМК КР / Духовное Управление мусульман Кыргызстана – ДУМК КР. *Mufti* – in Islam, a higher theological figure empowered to pronounce opinions on religious and legal matters. *Muftiat* – the area under the jurisdiction of the Mufti.
33. Kabar, "V Kyrgyzstane kolichestvo mechetej sravnjalos' s kolichestvom shkol."
34. Ibid.
35. Muslim Uzbekistan, "V Kyrgyzstane nachali schitat' kolichestvo mechetej."
36. Dor, *Contribution à l'étude des Kirghiz du Pamir Afghan*.
37. Wikiznanie, "Doklad kapitana."
38. Stein, "Expedition in Central Asia," 361.
39. Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan*.
40. A *yurt* is a portable, felt-covered, wood lattice-framed dwelling structure traditionally used by Turkic and Mongolian nomads in Central Asia. A *yurt* is more home-like than a tent in shape and build, with thicker walls.
41. Stroilov, *Alay menen Pamirdi ashyp*.

42. Office of the Geographer, “Afghanistan – USSR boundary.”
43. Kreutzmann and Felmy, “Wakhan Woluswali in Badakhshan.”
44. Mauri, “Kogda risk – eto zhizn’!”
45. Before the October Revolution of 1917 *kishlaki* were either permanent settlements or the winter domiciles of a seminomadic population. In Soviet times *kishlak* = small village in Central Asia.
46. A title of Muslim that effectuated pilgrimage into Mecca.
47. Mauri, “Kogda risk – eto zhizn’!”
48. Also *argali*, *archar* (Ovis ammon polii). The connection with Marco Polo is according to his reports from Central Asia about rams with horns six spans long (more than 1 m).
49. The Wakhi people (or Khik), are an ethnic group originating in the Wakhan of today’s Afghanistan.
50. Mauri, “Kogda risk – eto zhizn’!”
51. Callahan, *The Kyrgyz of the Afghan Pamir Ride On*.
52. Ibid.
53. Chernov, “Pamirskie Kyrgyzy: Dva Naroda, Odná Naciya.”
54. Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan*.
55. Callahan, *The Kyrgyz of the Afghan Pamir Ride On*.
56. Ibid.
57. All information in this section are based on field research in 2008.
58. Data in this section are based on field research in 2008.
59. Comes at the vernal equinox.
60. It is a celebration to mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan.
61. Kubatov, “Afganskije kirgizy.”
62. Nacstatkomitet Kyrgyzskoj Respubliki (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic). *Social’nye tendencii Kyrgyzskoj Respubliki 2002–2006*.

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## APPENDIX

## Transliteration guide

AF – Afghani (Pashto), CN – Chinese, GR – Greek, KG – Kyrgyz, KZ – Kazakh, RU – Russian, TJ – Tajik, UZ – Uzbek

Used term	Other variants	Original script
<i>Geographical places</i>		
Batken		Баткен (KG, RU)
Bazarbashe		Базарбаше (KG, RU)
Bishkek	Pishpek	Бишкек (KG, RU)
Cyuh		Чуй (KG, RU)
Isfana		Исфана (KG, RU)
Ishkashim	Ishkas hem	Ишкашим (TJ, RU)
	Eshkashem	مېشاکش (AF)
	Eskasem	
Karategin		Каратегин (TJ, RU)
Ohs		Ош (KG, RU)
Shuoldara	Shulwadar	رداولوش (AF)
	Shūlwadar	ارادلووش (AF)
Suusamyr		Суусамыр (KG, RU)
Tarbagatai		塔尔巴哈台山 (CN)
Uzgen	Özgön	Узген (RU), Өзгөн (KG)
Vachshir	Vakhjir	ری جو لتوک (Persian)
	Wakhjir	
Wakhan	Vakhan	ناخاو (AF)
		Вахон (TJ)
		Вахан (RU)
<i>Ethnonyms</i>		
Khakas	Khakass	хакасы (RU)
Кыпчак		кыпчак (KG)
Kyrgyz	Kirgiz	кыргыз (KG), киргиз (RU)
	Kirghiz	
	Kyrghiz	
	Qyrghiz	

Kyzylayak	Kyzylajak	кызылаяк (KG)
Mamachar		мамачар (KG)
Naiman	Nayman	найман (KG)
Wakhi	Khik	Ўик (Wakhi), ваханцы (RU)
Zhikzhim		жикжим (KG)
<i>Names</i>		
Abdurashid-khan	Abdurashid Khan	Абдурашид-хан (RU)
Alimbekov, M. Sh.		Алимбаков, М. Ш. (RU)
Chernov, S.		Чернов, С. (RU)
Derbisheva, A. M.		Дербишева, А. М. (RU)
Genghis Khan		成吉思汗 (CN)
Grombchevskij, B. L.	Grąbczewski, B.L.	Громбчевский, Б. Л. (RU)
Manas		Манас (KG, RU)
Ploskih, V.		Плоских, В. (KG, RU)
Rachmankul-khan	Rakhmankul Khan	Рахманкул-хан (RU)
Razzakov, Iskhak		Раззаков, Исхак (KG, RU)
Sima Qian		司馬遷 (CN)
Stroilov, L.		Строилов, Л. (RU)
Zemarkh	Zemarchos	Ζήμαρχος (GR)
	Zemarchus	
<i>Turkic and borrowed words</i>		
aksakal		аксакал (KG)
Alpamysh		Алпамыш (UZ, KZ, KG, RU)
aul	ail	аул, аил, айыл (KG)
bespha rmak	beshbarmak	бешпармак, бешбармак (KG, KZ)
djailo	jailo	джайлоо (KG)
kalym		калым (KG)
kishlaks		кишлаки (TJ, KG)
koshok		кошок (KG)

kumys	kumis	кымыз (KG), кумыс (RU)
kurut		курут (KG)
manaps		манапы (KG)
manty		манты (KG, RU)
namaz	salah	صلاة (Arabic), نماز (Persian)
	salat	
omin	omen	оминь (KG), аминь (RU)
	amen	αμήν (GR)
öy	oj	өй билө (KG)
Pasbani Pamir		ریم اپزا عفادم (AF)
plov	palov	плов (UZ, KG, RU)
	polov	پلو (Persian)
shamsi (Persian calendar)		سناریا یرامش هاگ (Persian)