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WEDDING GIFT EXCHANGE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GIFT EXCHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF KALMYK AND KAZAKH CULTURE

The article is devoted to the phenomenon of gift exchange as an important social and cultural phenomenon that influences interpersonal and intercultural relations. The author explores the historical aspects of gift exchange, emphasizing its functions in different societies, from strengthening tribal and social ties to the manifestation of respect and solidarity between people. The paper analyzes the types of gifts, their symbolism and meanings, and examines the role of gift exchange in rituals such as weddings. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between the tangible and intangible aspects of gift exchange, as well as to the non-verbal communication that accompanies the gift-giving process. The exchange of gifts in wedding rituals plays a significant role in strengthening social and family ties, as well as in the symbolic confirmation of the intentions of the parties. The article focuses on the study of wedding gift exchange as an important ritual in different cultures, including in the context of Kazakh and Kalmyk traditions. In Kazakhs and Kalmyks, as well as in many Turkic-language peoples, gift-giving was one of the forms of communication and had one of the important material and symbolic meanings in the establishment and maintenance of social ties. The wedding gift exchange among Kazakhs and Kalmyks is an important part of a traditional wedding, reflecting the respect and mutual obligations between the families of the bride and groom. Attention is paid to the subject of the gift, its symbolism, the process of presenting gifts, the order, and the material value of these things. The wedding gift exchange symbolizes the union of two clans and the unification of their material and spiritual resources. In this paper, the wedding gift exchange in Kazakh culture is compared with that in Kalmyk culture. The study is based on a cultural approach, which allows us to consider the wedding gift exchange as part of a system of symbolic actions that consolidate social ties and cultural values. The main method was literary analysis, aimed at the comprehension of theoretical concepts of gift exchange and the interpretation of ethnographic descriptions.

Keywords: wedding ceremony, gift exchange, Kazakh traditional culture, Kalmyk traditional culture, material and symbolic side of a gift, cultural communication, social interaction, everyday culture.

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Үйлену тойында сыйлық алмасу: қалмақ және қазақ мәдениеті жағдайында сыйлық алмасуды салыстырмалы талдау

Мақала тұлғааралық және мәдениетаралық қатынастарға әсер ететін маңызды әлеуметтік және мәдени құбылыс ретінде сыйлық алмасу феноменіне арналған. Автор сыйлық алмасудың тарихи аспектілерін зерттеп, оның әртүрлі қоғамдардағы функцияларына тоқталады: отбасылық және әлеуметтік байланыстарды нығайтудан адамдар арасындағы құрмет пен ынтымақтастықты көрсетуге дейін. Жұмыста сыйлық түрлері, олардың нышандары мен мағыналары талданып, үйлену тойы сияқты салт-дәстүрлердегі сыйлық алмасудың рөлі қарастырылады. Сыйлық алмасудың материалдық және материалдық емес аспектілерінің өзара әрекеттестігіне, сондай-ақ сыйлық беру үдерісімен бірге жүретін вербалды емес қарым-қатынасқа ерекше назар аударылады. Неке қию рәсімдерінде сыйлықтар алмасу әлеуметтік және отбасылық байланыстарды нығайтуда, сондай-ақ тараптардың ниеттерін символдық түрде растауда маңызды рөл атқарады. Мақала үйлену тойына сыйлық алмасуды әртүрлі мәдениеттерде, соның ішінде қазақ және

дәстүрлері контекстінде маңызды рәсім ретінде зерттеуге бағытталған. Қазақтар мен қалмақтар арасында, сондай-ақ көптеген түрік тілдес халықтар арасында сыйлық алмасу қарым-қатынас түрлерінің бірі болды және әлеуметтік байланыстарды орнату мен сақтауда маңызды материалдық және символдық мәндердің бірі болды. Қазақтар мен қалмақтар арасындағы үйлену тойының бір-бірімен сыйлық алмасуы дәстүрлі тойдың маңызды бөлігі болып табылады, ол жігіт пен қалыңдықтың отбасы арасындағы сыйластық пен өзара міндеттемелерді көрсетеді. Сыйлық беру тақырыбына, оның символикасына, сыйлықтарды ұсыну процесіне, осы заттардың реті мен материалдық құндылығына назар аударылады. Үйлену тойына сыйлық алмасу екі отбасының бірігуін және олардың материалдық және рухани ресурстарын біріктіруді білдіреді. Бұл еңбекте қазақ мәдениетіндегі той тарту алмасу қалмақ мәдениетіндегі той тарту алмасуымен салыстырылады. Зерттеу үйлену тойындағы сыйлық алмасуды әлеуметтік байланыстар мен мәдени құндылықтарды күшейтетін символдық әрекеттер жүйесінің бір бөлігі ретінде қарастыруға мүмкіндік беретін мәдени көзқарасқа негізделген. Негізгі әдіс сыйлық алмасудың теориялық тұжырымдамаларын түсінуге және этнографиялық сипаттамаларды түсіндіруге бағытталған әдеби талдау болды.

Түйін сөздер: үйлену тойының салт-дәстүрі, сыйлық алмасу, қазақтың дәстүрлі мәдениеті, қалмақ дәстүрлі мәдениеті, сыйлықтың материалдық және символдық жағы, мәдени қарым-қатынас, әлеуметтік қарым-қатынас, күнделікті мәдениет.

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Свадебный обмен подарков: сравнительный анализ дарообмена в контексте калмыцкой и казахской культуры

Статья посвящена феномену дарообмена как важному социальному и культурному явлению, которое оказывает влияние на межличностные и межкультурные отношения. Автор исследует исторические аспекты дарообмена, акцентируя внимание на его функциях в казахском и калмыцком обществах: от укрепления родовых и социальных связей до проявления уважения и солидарности между людьми. В работе анализируются типы подарков, их символика и значения, а также изучается роль дарообмена в свадебном ритуале. Особое внимание уделяется взаимодействию материальных и нематериальных аспектов дарообмена, а также невербальной коммуникации, которая сопровождает процесс дарования. Обмен подарками в свадебных обрядах играет значимую роль в укреплении социальных и родовых связей, а также в символическом подтверждении намерений сторон. В статье исследуется свадебный обмен подарками как важного ритуала в различных культурах, в том числе в контексте казахской и калмыцкой традиции. У казахов и калмыков дарение подарков являлось одной из форм коммуникации и имело одно из важных материальных и символических значений в установлении и поддержании социальных связей. Свадебный дарообмен у казахов и калмыков – это важная часть традиционной свадьбы, отражающая уважение и взаимные обязательства между семьями жениха и невесты. В статье рассматривается предмет дарения и его символика уделяется внимание самому процессу очередности и материальной ценности этих вещей. Свадебный дарообмен символизирует союз двух родов и объединение их материальных и духовных ресурсов. В данной работе применили символический и сравнительно-сопоставительный метод. В основе исследования лежит символический подход, позволяющий рассмотреть свадебный обмен подарками как часть системы символических действий, закрепляющих социальные связи и культурные ценности. Основными методами исследования в статье являются литературный, символический и сравнительный анализ, направленные на осмысление теоретических концепций дарообмена и интерпретацию этнографических описаний.

В исследовании использовался контент-анализ этнографических и культурологических источников, обеспечивший систематизацию и интерпретацию данных, отражающих специфику свадебного дарообмена. Применение сравнительно-сопоставительного метода позволило выявить как общие, так и отличительные черты данного обряда в калмыцкой и казахской культурных традициях.

Ключевые слова: свадебный обряд, дарообмен, казахская традиционная культура, калмыцкая традиционная культура, материальная и символическая сторона подарка, культурная коммуникация, социальное взаимодействие, повседневная культура.

Introduction

In cultural anthropology, the problem of gift exchange is considered not simply as an act and obligations arising from giving and receiving. Its power lies in the establishment of relationships, the consolidation of social ties, the emergence of obligations and social ties, the acquisition of status and social position, and the acquisition of resources that are necessary for the life and reproduction of people and society. In the context of the wedding ceremony, gift exchange acquires special significance, as it not only symbolizes the union of two people but also serves as a mechanism for integrating their families, expanding social networks, and confirming their belonging to a certain cultural tradition. In modern societies, the wedding gift exchange continues to perform important functions – it reflects the socio-economic status of the participants, their readiness for responsibility, and commitment to community norms. Moreover, analyzing exchange practices within the framework of a wedding allows us to identify transformations in values and roles within society, as well as to preserve the cultural memory contained in the rituals and symbolism of gifts.

Degree of development of the problem

The first empirical development of this concept was proposed by Bronislaw Malinowski, who studied the ritual system of kula exchange among the peoples of Melanesia. In his work “Argonauts of the Western Pacific”, he showed that the exchange of valuables (necklaces and bracelets) serves the function of maintaining intergroup ties, confirming social status, and is built into the system of mythological ideas (Malinowski, 2007, pp. 167-175).

The problem of gift exchange has been actively developed in the scientific tradition since the beginning of the 20th century. One of the first to lay the theoretical foundations of this topic was Marcel Mauss. In his work “Essay on the Gift” he showed that a gift is not just the transfer of an object, but a social act that includes obligations to give, accept, and respond (Mauss, 1999, pp. 72-75). Further theoretical development of the idea of gift exchange is associated with the works of Claude Levi-Strauss, who, in his book “Structural Anthropology”, analyzed exchange as an element of structural relations within society. He considered gift exchange as a symbolic act regulating marital and family ties, especially in the context of the “exchange of women” as a form of social contract (Levi-Strauss, 2011, pp. 81-89).

The issues of gift exchange in the traditional culture of the Kalmyks occupy an important place in the works of ethnographers and cultural scientists, since the exchange of gifts is not just a material practice, but a significant cultural mechanism for establishing and maintaining social ties. Researchers emphasize that gift exchange encompasses a wide range of meanings, from the legal consolidation of marriages to the symbolic expression of respect and belonging within certain social structures.

The issues of ritual gift exchange in Kalmyk traditional culture are covered in detail in the work of U.D. Dushan, “Customs and Rites of Pre-Revolutionary Kalmykia.” The researcher emphasizes that gift exchange during matchmaking plays not only a material, but also an important ritual and symbolic role (Dushan, 1976, pp. 28–30). Particular attention in the study of Kalmyk wedding ceremonies is given to the practice of gift exchange, which, as M.M. Batmaev notes, plays a key role in the process of matchmaking and marriage. The author emphasizes that the exchange of gifts performs not only a material, but also an important symbolic function, helping to strengthen social and family ties between the parties (Batmaev, 2003, pp. 58–64).

A historical and ethnographic understanding of gift exchange practices is proposed in the work of U. Erdniev. The author considers the exchange of gifts as a mechanism for regulating inter-clan relations and a means of strengthening stable social ties in the context of a nomadic lifestyle (Erdniev, 1985, pp. 115–120).

D.D. Shalkhakov presents a systematic approach to analyzing wedding gift exchange and identifies three key functions in it: socio-legal, symbolic, and regulatory. Particular attention is paid to the stages of gift exchange and its consolidation within the ritual structure (Shalkhakov, 1982, pp. 58–64). Thus, a holistic view of gift exchange as a key element of the traditional culture of the Kalmyks can be traced in the scientific literature. Researchers emphasize its importance not only in everyday and ritual contexts, but also as a tool for reproducing social structure and collective identity.

The issues of wedding gift exchange occupy an important place in Kazakh ethnography and cultural studies. The wedding ritual, which comprises several stages, is not only a legal and property procedure but also a culturally enshrined mechanism for forming inter-clan ties, social identity, and expressing symbolic meanings. The classics of the Kazakh intellectual tradition also addressed issues related to wedding rituals and customs. In the ethnographic

notes of Ch. Ualikhanov, “kalyn mal” (қалың мал), is described as an important institution that plays a role in the formalization of marriage and the establishment of stable ties between clans. He considers this phenomenon not just as a material transaction, but as part of the moral and cultural code of Kazakh society (Ualikhanov, 1985, v. 1, pp. 158-160). A. Baitursynov, in his works devoted to culture and language, emphasized the importance of traditional rituals as bearers of moral guidelines. In his opinion, the ritual of gift exchange contributes to the socialization of youth, fostering respect for tradition, parents, and family relationships (Baitursynov, 1992, pp. 102–104).

An important role in understanding the place and role of gift exchange, including wedding gift exchange, is played by the literary and artistic heritage of the Kazakh people, in particular by M. Auezov, who in the epic novel “Abai Zholy” (Абай жолы) describes wedding ceremonies, including the exchange of gifts, which are presented as part of a complex system of social relations. Through descriptions of gifts passed on between clans, issues of power, honor, agreements, and the observance of customs are revealed (Auezov, 2023, vol. 2, pp. 45-50).

A modern philosophical and cultural understanding of gift exchange ceremonies is given by A.Kh. Kasymzhanov, who considers them as part of the ethical and axiological system of Kazakh society. He emphasizes that a gift in Kazakh culture is a form of expressing respect, agreement, and recognition, a symbol of integration and mutual obligations (Kasymzhanov, 1998, pp. 67-72).

In the work of Dosymbek Katrana “Wedding Traditions of the Kazakhs: Past and Present” (Kazakh: Қазақтың үйлену салты: өткені мен бүгіні жайлы) the author examines the changes and evolution of wedding traditions among the Kazakhs. He focuses on the transformations of ceremonies and rituals associated with marriage and gift exchange, beginning with the traditional period and ending with modern changes (Katran, 1998, pp. 67–72). Seyit Kenjeakhmetuly also touches upon the role of gifts in establishing and strengthening social ties between families and clans, considering them as an element that contributes to the regulation of social order and the conclusion of mutual agreements. However, the symbolism of gift items and their significance in cultural communication remain largely unexplored in his study (Kenzheakhmetuly, 1997, pp. 142–148).

A.K. Galimova, in the textbook “Family Rituals of Rural Kazakhs of Northern Kazakhstan in the

Modern Period”, examines changes in wedding rituals, noting the transition from traditional material gifts to monetary ones, as well as the reduction of stages of wedding rituals. However, her work does not reveal the significance of gifts in cultural and symbolic communication (Galimova, 2020, pp. 67–74).

Justification for the choice of research problem.

Research on wedding gift exchange in Kazakh culture shows its versatility and sustainability as an element of cultural communication and social regulation. Through wedding gifts, collective identity is expressed, hierarchies and norms are established, and connections of long-term significance are formed. Despite the extensive ethnographic and cultural base established by Kazakh researchers on wedding ceremonies and related institutions, the analysis of the practice of wedding gift exchange in Kazakh culture reveals a number of unfinished and underexplored aspects. The study of the works of such authors as Sh. Ualikhanov, A. Baitursynov, M. Auezov, A.Kh. Kasymzhanov, D.Katran, S.Kenzheakhmetuly, and A.K. Galimova allow us to identify a number of theoretical and empirical gaps.

Thus, in the descriptions of Ch. Ualikhanov, the historical and legal perspective of the ritual dominates, where the gift is interpreted as part of the contractual mechanism between clans, but the practice of gift exchange as a form of cultural communication remains unexamined (Ualikhanov, 1985, pp. 26-30).

The works of A. Baitursynov and A.Kh. Kasymzhanov, in which the ritual is considered in the context of morality and the philosophy of culture, however, do not contain a specific analysis of the structure, stages, and subject semantics of wedding gifts, which limits their practical ethnographic applicability (Baitursynov, 1992, pp. 36-39; Kasymzhanov, 1998, pp. 56-58).

In the artistic legacy of M. Auezov, despite the vivid display of wedding scenes, there is no analytical explanation of the functions and symbolism of gifts as an element of the socio-cultural code (Auezov, 2023, pp. 46-53).

It is also worth noting that comparative analysis with other cultures – both closely related (Turkic, Uyghur, Kyrgyz, and regionally neighboring (Kalmyk, Mongolian)) – is practically absent in the literature, which deprives the study of context and the opportunity to identify universals and unique features.

Thus, despite a rich research tradition, significant gaps remain in the study of wedding gift exchange, particularly concerning oral tradition, cross-cultural comparisons, and the modern transformation of the ritual. This suggests the need for an in-depth analysis that incorporates interdisciplinary approaches, field materials, and comparative cultural methods. Conducting such a study will enable us to supplement and expand existing knowledge, as well as identify new aspects of the functioning of wedding gift exchange as an instrument of cultural communication and social regulation.

Despite the significant contribution of Kalmyk researchers to the study of gift exchange, several important aspects of this topic remain insufficiently covered and require further scientific understanding. In works devoted to Kalmyk gift exchange, a descriptive approach prevails, which focuses on recording wedding rituals, structures, and functions of gift exchange, but, as a rule, it does not include in-depth comparative cultural analysis. Moreover, most studies examine gift exchange in the context of traditional Kalmyk culture without taking into account its transformation in the context of modernization, urbanization, and globalization. Modern forms of wedding ceremonies, including changes in the symbolism of gifts and the commercialization of these practices, remain practically outside the field of view of researchers.

Insufficient attention has also been paid to comparative ethnographic studies that could reveal both unique and universal features of gift exchange among different ethnic groups. For example, an analysis of gift exchange in Kalmyk culture in the context of a broader socio-economic way of life of Mongolian, Turkic, and Kazakh peoples could significantly enrich the understanding of cultural processes and social mechanisms in traditional societies. Thus, an important task for future research is not only a detailed study of gift exchange in Kalmyk culture, but also its comparative analysis with Kazakh wedding practices, which will allow a deeper understanding of the specificity and universality of ritual systems in the Eurasian cultural context. This approach, which includes symbolic and intercultural analysis, will help to identify patterns in the social role of gifts, as well as their changes under the influence of social, economic, and cultural factors.

The problem of wedding gift exchange lies in the question of why gifts are exchanged at a wedding, and whether it is possible to do without this ritual. The exchange of wedding gifts is traditionally considered an expression of respect, love, and sup-

port, as well as a symbol of the beginning of a new stage in life for the young couple. However, despite established norms and customs, questions arise: do gifts truly hold deep meaning, or do they become just an obligatory social formality, sometimes burdening both the giver and the recipient? Is it possible to imagine a wedding without the exchange of gifts and still preserve all the symbolism of this event?

The aim of this article is to identify the features of wedding gift exchange in the Kazakh tradition, in comparison with similar practices in Kalmyk culture, with an emphasis on the symbolic and social aspects, as well as the transformation of these rituals in the modern context.

Tasks:

- substantiation of the social function of gifts, that is, the wedding exchange of gifts can be considered as a manifestation of mutual care and participation in the life of the couple;
- consider the functions and symbolism of gifts in the wedding tradition.

Novelty of the study

The scientific novelty of the article lies in conducting a comparative analysis of gift exchange practices during matchmaking in Kazakh and Kalmyk cultures, with an emphasis on identifying the deep symbolic and social meanings, as well as the degree of ritual formalization of these rites. In contrast to the traditional descriptive approach, this work offers an interpretation of wedding gifts as elements of socio-cultural communication that reflect value orientations, religious attitudes, and the historical and cultural specificity of each ethnic group. Particular attention is paid to the differences in the structure and content of the rites, which allows us to consider the role of gifts in a new way within the context of marital and family relations, as well as the transformation of rites in modern reality.

Research methodology

In the course of the study, the authors relied on a symbolic, comparative-contrastive approach, based on the collection and analysis of empirical material on Kalmyk and Kazakh everyday culture, which allowed the authors to interpret gift exchange as a complex cultural practice significant for the reproduction of social structures, symbolic communication, and the preservation of cultural identity.

Research methods

During the study, the authors used the following methods:

- content analysis of ethnographic and cultural sources;
- comparative-contrastive method to identify common and distinctive features of wedding gift exchange in Kalmyk and Kazakh cultures.

Discussion and results obtained

The conducted analysis allowed us to identify both general and specific features of the wedding gift exchange in the Kalmyk and Kazakh cultures. Both traditions demonstrate a high degree of ritualization in gift exchange, reflecting the importance of social control in establishing and strengthening ties between clans. At the same time, a gift is perceived not just as a material act, but as a socially significant action, accompanied by stable symbols and cultural codes.

In the Kalmyk tradition, according to the analysis of the works of D.D. Shalkhakov, the exchange of gifts had a strictly regulated nature and was carried out within the framework of a multi-stage wedding ceremony, starting with agreements between clans and ending with post-wedding reciprocal gifts. Gifts had a symbolic function, signifying recognition of obligations, respect for family ties, transfer of status, and an intention for a long-term union (Shalkhakov, 1956, pp. 46-53).

In Kazakh culture, as a comparative analysis has shown, the structure of gift exchange was also strictly organized, but had some peculiarities. For example, special importance was attached to gifts from the groom – *kalyn mal* (қалың мал), as well as gifts from the bride in return, including the *syrga salu* (сырға салу) ritual. Both among the Kalmyks and the Kazakhs, the gift system performed the functions of securing the marriage as a social contract and symbolic inclusion of the bride in the new clan.

Comparative analysis also revealed differences. In Kalmyk culture, the emphasis is on the poetic accompaniment of the exchange, where each gift is framed by a folklore statement emphasizing its meaning and significance. Among the Kazakhs, the emphasis is somewhat shifted towards demonstrating the wealth and material status of the parties, especially on the part of the groom.

Modern transformations of gift exchange can be traced in both cultures. Under the influence

of urbanization and market mechanisms, there is a partial loss of the symbolic content of the gift. Traditional items are replaced by monetary equivalents, the structure of the ceremony is simplified, and elements of oral tradition disappear. However, the principle of reciprocity and obligation is preserved, which indicates the stability of the basic cultural model.

Thus, the results of the study confirm that gift exchange in the wedding ceremonies of the Kalmyks and Kazakhs is a culturally and socially significant practice in which the functions of social integration, symbolic communication, and the reproduction of traditional values are intertwined. Despite certain differences, both cultures demonstrate a common Eurasian model of ritual gift giving, which opens up prospects for further comparative research.

In both ethnic groups (Kalmyks and Kazakhs), the exchange of gifts in the wedding context performs an important communicative function. Through the gift, not only are material values transferred, but also cultural meanings and symbols that are understandable to both parties to the ceremony are transmitted.

Thus, in both cultures, the wedding exchange is not just an act of transferring things, but a form of ritualized cultural communication that transmits social and moral meanings through actions and artifacts.

The exchange of gifts in wedding practices plays the role of a social mechanism regulating relations between families, clans, and the community as a whole.

- among the Kalmyks, gift exchange had a structure of mutual obligations between clans. This was a form of legitimization of the social union. The clan of the bride and groom engaged in a formalized interaction, where each gift held a symbolic meaning (Dushan, 1976, p. 148);

- among the Kazakhs, as described in ethnographic sources, the ritual “*kalyn mal*” (қалың мал) had a similar meaning: the transfer of wealth from the groom to the bride’s family, after which there was a reciprocal transfer of gifts and the organization of joint celebrations. This is a ritualized social agreement demonstrating the union between two social units.

Thus, in both cultures, the wedding gift exchange serves as a tool for the institutionalization of marriage and kinship, a form of normative interaction between kinship groups.

The wedding gift exchange among Kalmyks and Kazakhs is simultaneously communication,

interaction, and social regulation embodied in ritual. Despite the differences in form, the language of the gift remains a universal mechanism for transmitting culture and strengthening social ties. Differences are expressed in the structure of the ritual, folklore accompaniment, and the degree of symbolization of gifts, but the functions of the gift in the cultural system are largely similar.

The wedding gift exchange is an ancient and meaningful ritual present in various cultures of the world, playing a key role in establishing and strengthening interfamily ties. Gifts given during matchmaking and marriage serve not only as a material form of exchange, but also symbolize social obligations, respect, and recognition of the values and traditions of the parties. In different cultures, the wedding gift exchange can include a variety of items, ranging from symbolic gifts to more significant material items, such as livestock, money, or jewelry.

Gift exchange (or gift-giving) during matchmaking serves several important functions, both social and symbolic. This ritual is part of traditional customs and plays a key role in establishing and strengthening relationships between families, as well as in the marriage process.

Let us highlight the main functions of gift-giving in the context of matchmaking. First of all, let us note that gift-giving during matchmaking helps to strengthen and formalize the ties between two families. Gifts, as a rule, symbolize respect, good intentions, and the desire to maintain relationships based on mutual interests. Such an exchange helps establish trust between future relatives and facilitates the beginning of interaction on a deeper level. In matchmaking, gift-giving can serve as a confirmation of the seriousness of one party's intentions towards the other. This is a sign that the parties are committed to a long-term relationship and are willing to meet each other halfway. Gifts in this context serve as a symbolic "commitment," "agreement," or "concluded alliance," emphasizing the willingness of both parties to take a step toward each other and enter into an alliance.

In most cultures, gift exchange during matchmaking is associated with long-standing traditions that can be passed down from one generation to the next. This helps to preserve cultural and family values, which are important for strengthening the identity and continuity of the nation. Gifts can be not only material, but also spiritual, symbolizing respect for ancestors and traditions. Gift exchange can serve as a way

to smooth over potential contradictions between families that may arise during the matchmaking stage. For example, gifts can be a way to resolve conflicts, providing an opportunity for a more flexible approach in negotiations and overcoming cultural or social differences. This can be a kind of "first step" to establishing harmony and cooperation. Thus, gift exchange during matchmaking performs important social, cultural, and psychological functions, helping not only to symbolize the beginning of a new stage in a couple's life but also to strengthen relationships between families, assessing the readiness of both parties to live together.

In traditional cultures, gift exchange was an integral part of the wedding process, and the absence of gift exchange or violation of this ritual could be perceived as a violation of the social order. The ritual was strictly regulated and often accompanied by other obligations, such as a bride price (калым), a dowry, or other debt obligations. Gifts could be agreed upon in advance or required in a certain form, and in general, the process was more formalized and mandatory.

Research on gift exchange in our time is important not only for understanding cultural and social processes but also for a deeper understanding of how gifts affect interpersonal relationships, the economy, and global communications. This research allows us to identify how traditions change, how gift exchange adapts to modern conditions, and how it continues to perform key functions in society.

Ethnographers and writers of different eras paid attention to this issue in their works. This issue has always been relevant and in demand. One of the first ethnographers to pay attention to gift exchange was Shokan Ualikhanov. In his work "Notes on the Kirghiz," he raised the important issue that gift-giving was not only a material exchange, but a deep cultural process that influenced the social structure and interpersonal relationships in Kirghiz society. He demonstrated that through this ritual, concepts such as respect, recognition, union, and harmony were expressed, and that gifts held great significance in the life and cultural practices of the Kirghiz, serving as a link in social and political processes (Ualikhanov, 1965, pp. 124-126).

Among the Kazakh writers who have touched upon this issue in their works, Akhmet Baitursynov and Mukhtar Auezov stand out. Akhmet Baitursynov researched and documented the peculiarities of Kazakh culture at the beginning of the 20th century. The main points raised by A. Baitursynov in his work "Til tagylymy" (Тіл тағылымы) are the role of

the family in wedding ceremonies, he also focused on the design of the wedding as both a family and a social event. Baitursynov also emphasized the importance of language in relationships between people, and probably through linguistic behavior, he implied the importance of respect for traditions and cultural practices, including the exchange of gifts. Gifts, as part of a broader social practice, served not only to demonstrate material status but also to maintain social balance, express respect for elders, and strengthen ties within the community (Baitursynov, 1992, pp. 168-171).

A significant role in the study of the gift exchange problem is played by domestic literature, which has described numerous customs and rites of the Kazakh people. In particular, Mukhtar Auezov, a famous Kazakh writer, playwright, and scientist, often described important social rites and traditions of the Kazakhs in his works. His famous novel "The Path of Abai" (Абай жолы) depicts various aspects of Kazakh life, including traditions associated with marriage and "kыз uzatu" (кыз ұзату). The novel describes in detail the family rites, rituals, and customs, including moments associated with the bride's farewell in her home. It is important to note that in Auezov's novel "The Path of Abai", the "kuda tusu" (құда түсу) rite is not only a legal but also a deeply cultural process. Gifts in this context symbolize the "union of two clans". They are a form of language through which the families of the bride and groom communicate, establishing connections that extend beyond just material exchange. The attention paid to the choice of gifts and the way they are presented reflects respect for the traditions and values of Kazakh society (Auezov, 2023, pp. 248-251).

Among modern researchers who have studied this issue, we can note the dissertation work of Zubaida Kabiyeveva Suraganova, who, in her work "Traditional Gift Exchange Among the Kazakhs", draws attention to several important aspects of gift exchange in the culture of the Kazakhs. First, gift exchange is an important element of the social structure of the Kazakhs. Second, gift exchange is a way of strengthening social ties between individuals, families, and communities.

Considering gift exchange, Z. Suraganova highlighted the functions of gift exchange. Gift exchange plays an important role in maintaining mutual respect, trust, and social harmony. It should be noted that the author focuses on the ritualistic nature of gift exchange, especially in the context of wedding ceremonies.

She identifies different types of gifts that are used in the process of gift exchange. These can be both material gifts (for example, animals, food, handicrafts) and symbolic gifts (for example, textiles, jewelry, items reflecting the social status of the giver). Suraganova Z. also describes what gifts are most significant in certain social contexts. The scientist highlights how the exchange of gifts impacts relationships within the family, between relatives, and across different ethnic groups and societies. This is a special way of maintaining balance in interpersonal and intergroup relations. The author also considers gift exchange as an element of economic life that promotes the redistribution of resources and can perform a certain economic function, emphasizing the evolution of gift-giving practices, characterizing changes in the practice of gift-giving in modern society, and exploring how gift-giving traditions adapt to changing social and economic conditions (Suraganova, 2007, pp. 152-154). Overall, Zubaida Kabiyeveva Suraganova's work provides a deep understanding of how gift exchange in Kazakh culture serves not only social and economic purposes but also strengthens the cultural identity and social structure of society.

U. Erdniev studied various aspects of Kalmyk culture, including marriage and family traditions. His works on matchmaking and other rituals became important sources for ethnographers. His works explore customs related to marriage and matchmaking, as well as the importance of gift exchange in Kalmyk culture. Thus, he describes how the exchange of gifts served as an important part of matchmaking and other rituals in Kalmyk society. He categorized the types of gifts and highlighted the most common ones, such as cattle (including horses, cows, and sheep), fabrics and clothing, and food. Cattle were one of the most significant and traditional gifts in the matchmaking process. Matchmakers from the groom's side transferred not only material values, but also a symbolic gift showing respect for the bride and her family. Horses, in particular, were important gifts, as they symbolized prosperity and strength, which played an important role in the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Kalmyks. An important gift in the context of matchmaking could be fabrics used to make the bride's clothing. Fabrics, especially expensive and rare ones, demonstrated the wealth and seriousness of the groom's family's intentions. In some cases, gift exchange included products such as grain or other agricultural goods, which showed the groom's family's willingness to support not only the material

but also the food well-being of the bride (Erdniev, 1985, pp. 77-80).

The exchange of gifts during matchmaking was, first of all, an act of respect from the groom's family to the bride's family. Gifts served as evidence of the seriousness of the groom's and his family's intentions regarding the future marriage. Gifts symbolized the acceptance of responsibility and obligations for the bride. Gift exchange was also an important tool for strengthening social ties between two families and clans. The exchange of material values served as a kind of "pact" between clans, creating a basis for cooperation, support, and mutual assistance in the future.

Gifts given during matchmaking also had a symbolic meaning. For example, horses and cattle symbolized prosperity and stability, and fabrics and clothing – belonging to a high social status and wealth of the family. These symbols united families in the process of matchmaking and marriage. The exchange of gifts was associated with the establishment of material obligations. For example, *kalym* (калым) ensured the financial stability of the bride's family in the event of any difficulties, and gifts of food and utensils showed the willingness to provide for the bride in her new home. As a result, the exchange of gifts during the matchmaking process was not just an exchange of material goods, but also an important social and cultural ritual that strengthened ties between families, confirmed the seriousness of intentions, and ensured social stability for the future family.

The study by U.D. Dushan "Customs and Rites of Pre-Revolutionary Kalmykia" is a valuable ethnographic material that allows us to analyze the mechanisms and principles of gift exchange in the wedding rituals of the Kalmyks. The author pays special attention to the ritual nature of the offerings and their social hierarchy in the structure of the ritual. According to the author, in the process of preparing for the wedding and during the matchmaking, the groom's side presented gifts to the bride's family, which served as an expression of respect, consent, and intentions to enter into a marriage union.

Special importance was attached to offerings to the groom's parents. The bride's relatives gave the groom's parents expensive dresses and wide trousers made of simple material to his mother. This symbolic gift was made as a sign of gratitude to the womb of the mother who gave birth to a son. This ritual was performed in the *kibitkas* of paternal uncles, older brothers, and other close relatives of the groom (Erdniev, 1985, p. 197). Gift exchange in Kalmyk

culture, as the researcher shows, is organized in strict accordance with the age and status hierarchy. The most valuable gifts were presented to elders and older relatives: men were given large gifts in the form of horses, and women were given robes "terlik" (терлик), "tsegdik" (цегдик), or a special dress "hutsan" (хутцан). These elements of clothing had a symbolic meaning, confirming respect for the recipient and recognition of his position in the clan system (Dushan, 1976, p. 159).

A special ritual accompanied the moment of gift-giving: the robe was put on a seated person from behind, with only the right sleeve being put on – the left sleeve remained on the shoulder or hung down. The symbolism of robes, sewn roughly, with wide stitches, without pockets and buttons, is also emphasized, which excludes any suspicions of treachery or hidden intentions. Instead of ready-made clothes, cuts of fabric were often used, allowing the recipient to make their own clothes, which also symbolized respect for personal will and status. Special ritual objects are also mentioned, such as "oltse" (ольгце), which are colored bundles of threads hung in the house. They carried a symbolic load and were considered amulets. An incorrect combination of colors or their absence could be interpreted as a bad sign, which emphasizes the sacred meaning of objects in the structure of the wedding ceremony (Dushan, 1976, pp. 100–102).

Thus, U.D. Dushan considers the exchange of gifts as the most important element of the institution of marriage among the Kalmyks, performing the functions of social legitimization, symbolic consent, and confirmation of the marriage contract. The exchange of wedding gifts in the Kalmyk tradition was not limited to a material function but performed an important socio-communicative and ritual role, forming and strengthening family and social ties between the parties to the marriage union.

In the context of studying Kalmyk marriage and family rituals, special attention is paid to the phenomenon of gift exchange, which, as M.M. Batmaev emphasizes, is an integral part of wedding ritual practice. The researcher considers gift exchange as a socially significant mechanism that ensures the establishment and consolidation of family and interclan ties, as well as confirming the status of the participants in the ritual (Batmaev, 2003, pp. 58-59). According to his observations, at the initial stage of matchmaking, the groom's representatives, matchmakers, present the bride's family with gifts of a symbolic nature, such as tea, sweets, and fabrics. These gifts play the role

of the “first step” in formalizing relations between families. This step expresses respect and confirms the seriousness of intentions. Upon consent to marriage, subsequent stages were accompanied by more significant gifts. In this case, more significant offerings follow, including clothing, jewelry, and household items, silverware, meat, and alcoholic beverages. Each of these objects carries a certain symbolic meaning: fabric is a wish for well-being and prosperity, jewelry is a recognition of the social status of the bride, and meat is a symbol of abundance, hospitality, and well-being (Batmaev, 2003, pp. 60–64). Batmaev emphasizes that such a practice had an important social significance: it contributed to strengthening the ties between the two clans, demonstrating mutual respect and a readiness for long-term interaction. Gift exchange is not just an element of the wedding ritual, but an important mechanism for maintaining social stability in traditional Kalmyk society. Thus, in the works of M.M. Batmaev, gift exchange is presented as a socially and ritually significant element that contributes to maintaining the stability of intra-family and inter-clan ties in Kalmyk society.

Shalkhakov D.D. also studied Kalmyk traditions and customs, including the role of matchmaking and family. His works complement the studies devoted to the social and family structures of the Kalmyks and consider matchmaking rituals, family, and marriage practices of the Kalmyks. The author examines in detail various aspects of Kalmyk culture, including matchmaking rituals, family and marriage practices. He focuses on several important points regarding the tradition of matchmaking and gift exchange, as well as the significance of gifts in the matchmaking and marriage process (Shalkhakov, 1976, pp. 56–57). Shalkhakov D.D. emphasizes that the exchange of gifts plays a key role in the matchmaking ritual, as it serves as a symbolic gesture demonstrating the seriousness of the groom’s family’s intentions and their respect for the bride’s family. Gifts in Kalmyk culture in the context of matchmaking were also a means of establishing mutual trust and strengthening the social status of both parties. The author emphasizes that gift exchange was not limited to a simple exchange of material goods. It was a kind of agreement between families that secured obligations and created space for future social and family relations. Gift exchange during matchmaking symbolized an agreement on a future marriage, as well as confirmation of the groom’s family’s material readiness (Shalkhakov, 1976, pp. 60–61).

In his fundamental work “Family and Marriage among the Kalmyks”, D.D. Shalkhakov studies the traditional Kalmyk marriage and family rituals in detail, including an important component – the exchange of gifts in wedding rituals. He emphasizes that the wedding gift exchange among the Kalmyks played a multifunctional role:

- social and legal – gifts confirmed the fact of the marriage and the obligations between the parties, and served as a kind of “guarantee” of the agreement between families;

- symbolic – certain gifts (for example, clothing, livestock, jewelry) had special meaning, indicating the status of the family, respect for the relatives of the groom/bride;

- regulatory – the system of gifts helped maintain balance in relations between clans, and reflected the principles of reciprocity and balance.

Shalkhakov pays special attention to the description of the ritual stages of gift exchange – from preliminary negotiations (*kövych*) (*көвүч*) to post-wedding gifts, such as “bus dar” (*бүс дар*) (a return gift to the bride’s family). He shows how each stage of the wedding ceremony included a strictly defined list of gifts that emphasized the significance of the ceremony and the social expectations of the parties (Shalkhakov, 1982, pp. 62–63).

As we can see, traditions and customs play an important place in the life of every nation, and for the Kazakhs, they are of particular importance, since they reflect their values, worldview, and way of life. Traditions and customs help preserve cultural identity and ensure stability in society and space. Customs and traditions play a major role in maintaining strict order and strengthening ties within the family and community. For example, traditions such as matchmaking, seeing off the bride, or holidays create opportunities for meetings, communication, and maintaining family ties. In Kazakh culture, attention to family values is especially important.

The Kazakh wedding ceremony was formed on the basis of social interactions in traditional Kazakh society, thanks to principles related to traditional ideas about the world, its structure, and the interaction of man with nature and the cosmos. These views were formed on the basis of philosophical, spiritual, and natural observations, which were an important part of Kazakh culture and way of life. This meant that through wedding rituals, one can trace how the social organization was structured in traditional Kazakh society. The large patriarchal family played a leading role in the social structure, and it was this family that determined how relationships were built

within the family. In such a society, the head of the family (usually the eldest man – the father) held the greatest power and influence, regulating daily affairs and relationships between family members. There was a clear hierarchy within the family, where the elders, by age or status, had the right to make decisions, and the younger ones were obligated to obey these decisions. These relationships influenced the organization of everyday life, the distribution of responsibilities, and the social dynamics of the family as a whole.

The traditional wedding complex of the Kazakhs can be considered as an act, a contract of communication between two parties, in which considerable attention is paid to the symbolic pragmatics, since the ritual regulating everyday life simultaneously expresses both the practical and symbolic sides. The entire wedding ceremony of the Kazakhs, which consisted of several ceremonial components such as “kuda tusu” (құда түсу), “syrga salu” (сырға салу), “kyz uzatu” (қыз ұзату), “kelin tusiru” (келін түсіру) – “bet ashar” (бет ашар).

Matchmaking among the Kazakhs is an important ritual that plays a significant role in establishing marital relations between families. This is not just a formality, but a process during which the future spouses and their families begin to exchange symbolic gestures and gifts. The gifts given by the matchmakers have a deep meaning and represent respect, well-being, prosperity, and friendship between the two clans.

Kasymzhanov A.Kh., in his work “Space and Time of Great Traditions”, draws attention to various aspects of social interaction, including gift exchange, and analyzes it as an important element in maintaining cultural and social norms among the Kazakhs. One of the key points in his study is the division of gifts depending on certain criteria, such as kinship and age. In traditional Kazakh culture, gift exchange often depends on kinship ties. For example, gifts exchanged between close relatives can be more significant and have greater symbolic value. Interactions between relatives, especially at the level of older and younger ones, emphasize respect, support, and the strengthening of family ties. For example, gifts can be passed between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, or from older to younger ones, which reflects social hierarchy and family relationships. In turn, the age of both the giver and the recipient of the gift is of great importance. Gifts from older to younger individuals usually carry not only material value but also symbolic value, expressing care, respect, and mentorship. This re-

flects the importance of elders in traditional Kazakh society and their role in passing on knowledge and life experience (Kasymzhanov, 2001, pp. 163-165).

Kasymzhanov also considers how social status influences gift exchange. People with a higher social status may give more valuable or symbolically significant gifts, which also emphasizes their status in society. Such an exchange helps to strengthen social ties and hierarchies in traditional society. Thus, in his work, Kasymzhanov emphasizes that gift exchange among Kazakhs often depends on family ties, the age of the participants in the exchange, as well as social status. These factors influence the types of gifts, their value, and the symbolic meaning in interpersonal relationships.

In the article “Wedding Traditions of the Kazakhs: Past and Present”, Kazakh researcher Dosymbek Katran focuses on the changes and preservation of traditional wedding customs in the context of the historical development of Kazakh society. The main points he draws attention to are the historical evolution of wedding traditions: how wedding customs have changed over time, from the nomadic period to the present day. He examines changes in wedding ceremonies, rituals, as well as the social status of wedding participants, such as the roles of the groom, bride, their families, and guests.

The second aspect that Katran draws attention to is the preservation of traditional elements in modern weddings: the author pays attention to how traditions, despite modern changes in society, are preserved and adapted. He emphasizes the importance of preserving such key elements of weddings as the exchange of gifts (kuda tusu) (құда түсу), the ransom of the bride (kalyn mal) (қалыңмал), wedding ceremonies, and rituals that preserve the cultural identity of the Kazakhs (Katran, 2015, pp. 7-8).

Katran also emphasizes the deep symbolic meaning of various wedding ceremonies. For example, the exchange of gifts or presents has not only a material meaning, but also an important social and cultural meaning that maintains harmony and mutual respect between families. Thus, in his work, Dosymbek Katran focuses on the preservation and change of wedding traditions in Kazakh society, the role of family and kinship in wedding ceremonies, as well as how modern conditions affect traditional rituals.

Seyit Kenjeahmetuly, in his work “Life and Culture of the Kazakh People”, focuses on various aspects of the traditional culture and life of the Kazakhs, exploring the most important elements of social organization, family customs, and cultural

traditions. He draws attention to the following main points: this is an analysis of the social structure of the Kazakhs, while focusing on the role of clan, tribe, and family ties in everyday life. The author examines how traditional elements such as clan relations and hierarchy influenced everyday life and the structure of society. S. Kenjeahmetuly examines in detail the ritual and everyday customs of the Kazakhs, including weddings, funerals, hospitality rituals, gift-exchange customs, and holidays. He emphasizes how these customs contribute to strengthening social ties and maintaining cultural traditions. The author considers gift-exchange as an important element of the traditional culture of the Kazakh people, focusing on its social and cultural significance. He notes that gift exchange in Kazakh culture is not limited to a simple exchange of material values, but performs several functions, including symbolic and ritual ones (Kenzheakhmetuly, 2006, pp. 113-115). He pays special attention to the fact that gift exchange is an important means of strengthening social ties, an expression of mutual respect and recognition, as well as a mechanism for transmitting cultural values and norms. Gift exchange also serves as a sign of establishing or confirming social relations, such as friendship, alliance, or agreement. The scientist emphasizes that in the conditions of a traditional society, where formal contracts and legal mechanisms were poorly developed or absent, gift exchange played the role of an informal “contract”. Thus, gift exchange acquires a special function as a symbol of mutual obligations and willingness to fulfill one’s agreements, which gives it importance as a cultural and social tool.

Galimova A.K. focuses on the changes and preservation of traditional family rituals among the Kazakhs of Northern Kazakhstan in the context of modern reality. The issue of gift exchange in the context of her research is also addressed, but it is not the central theme of the work. The author considers gift exchange as one of the elements of family rituals, such as weddings, birthdays, funerals, and other significant events. She notes that gift exchange in these rituals retains its symbolic function, serving not only as an expression of mutual respect and good intentions, but also as a strengthening of social ties within the family and community (Galimova, 2003, p. 27).

Kazakhs are especially attentive to the choice of treats for the “kuda tusu” (күда түсу) ceremony, since each product has its own meaning and symbolism. Treats for matchmaking symbolize various aspects of family relationships, respect, and mutual

understanding between families. Let us give as an example several dishes that are traditionally served on the table during the “kuda tusu” (күда түсу) matchmaking – the hot dish kuyrdak (куырдак) (fried meat with entrails), this is a traditional Kazakh dish symbolizing harmony and fertility. The meat added to kuyrdak, especially the entrails, is considered a symbol of vitality and procreation. The second common hot dish is beshbarmak (бешбармак) (boiled meat with noodles) – this is one of the most important and favorite dishes of the Kazakh people, symbolizing hospitality and unity. By serving it at matchmaking, Kazakhs express their readiness for cooperation, establishing close ties and respect for future relatives. Among the drinks, kumys (күмыс) is served, a fermented milk drink traditionally symbolizing health and happiness, which showcases the generosity of the hosts, as its preparation requires time and effort. Among the sweets on the table, one can note shyrkanak (шырканак), dairy products such as cottage cheese, and honey, which symbolize the sweetness of life, friendliness, and love, and also express sincere wishes for the well-being and health of the newlyweds. Of the fruits, grapes are often placed on the table, symbolizing prosperity and longevity. Their serving can symbolize a wish for happiness and good luck, as well as the continuation of the family. And of course, the festive dastarkhan (дастархан) will not be complete without bread, because it is a symbol of prosperity, life, and harmony. It always occupies a central place on the table, emphasizing the importance of hospitality and respect for another person. With bread, guests feel cared for and attended to, which emphasizes the main goal of customs: the creation and strengthening of harmony and connection between families (Auezov, 2023, pp. 234-235).

Matchmaking customs in Kalmyk culture are closely connected with ritual ceremonies, including how the table is set, which symbolizes wealth, respect, and harmony in the future family. In Kalmyk culture, there are also special dishes that are traditionally present on the festive table during matchmaking, and each of them has its own symbolism. If we talk about special dishes for matchmaking and their symbolism, the following dishes are usually put on the festive table during matchmaking – kumys (күмыс) (mare’s milk), and boiled meat, “Boiled meat chopped into pieces, called by the Tatars “bishbarmak” (бишьбармак), five – fingers, and which nomadic tribes eat with a handful, also exists among the Kalmyks, but under two names: if the boiled meat is cut into large pieces (“a poor nomad,

busy with work all day long, has no time to chop finely, the Kalmyks note”), then this crumbled meat is called *keshkisy-makhan*” (кёшкисы-маханъ), and if small, then “*ishkisy-makhan*” (ишкисы -маханъ) (Nebolsin, 1852, p. 48). *Bortsogi* (Борцогий) (Kalmyk flatbreads) and dairy products. “*Bortsogi*, which were prepared from wheat flour, were fried in oil, animal or vegetable, and, as a rule, in a cauldron. *Bortsogi* were among the favorite dishes. They were rarely eaten as a festive dish, they were treated to guests.” (Erdniev, 1985, p. 187).

Kumys is traditionally considered an important drink in Kalmyk culture. It is a symbol of purity and health. Offering *kumys* during matchmaking can be a sign of respect and willingness to be hospitable. *Bortsogi* are Kalmyk flatbreads that can be served during matchmaking. They symbolize abundance and family well-being, as they were baked in the family on the day of matchmaking as a sign that the groom’s family is ready to accept the bride and ensure her future happiness and well-being, and dairy products such as cottage cheese, *ayran* (айран), butter and others are also often present on the festive table. Dairy products traditionally symbolize fertility and procreation, which is especially important in the context of marriage ceremonies and matchmaking. This symbolizes the readiness of the groom’s family to support the bride in running the household and ensuring family well-being. In some cases, depending on the ritual, sacrificial food (for example, meat from animals killed for ritual purposes) may be present on the festive table. It symbolizes the sacrifice given in honor of ancestors and gods, as well as a sign of gratitude and respect for the bride’s family (Shalkhakov, 1976, p. 78).

All these dishes served at matchmaking not only serve as treats but also hold a deep cultural and symbolic meaning. They represent friendship, respect, harmony, prosperity, and well-being of future family relationships. The treats demonstrate the willingness of both parties to establish a strong relationship and create a new family. All this also helps to create an atmosphere of respect, kindness, and willingness to cooperate between clans and family members, which makes matchmaking an important step in the life of the Kazakh people.

M. Auezov describes how the groom’s matchmakers, in their intention to approach the bride’s family with a proposal, must be especially careful not to offend or hurt the feelings of the other party [Auezov, 2023, pp. 254-256]. In Kazakh society, older family members play an important role in upbringing, conflict resolution, and decision-making.

The tradition of seating older people in places of honor is associated with respect for their life experience and wisdom. This reflects respect for the older generation. Seating guests on two opposite sides of the table emphasizes the idea of bringing together two clans. Over time, as the union between the groom and the bride strengthens, the families become one. Seating guests according to social status is also a sign of respect. This is a tradition that reflects cultural norms, where each guest has their own role and everyone is in their designated place, which contributes to the correct perception of the ceremony. Thus, the seating arrangement of guests during matchmaking in Kazakh culture is not just the organization of space, but an important element that symbolizes respect, age, family ties, and social status of the participants.

Gift-giving and exchange are key moments in matchmaking, and the act of giving gifts itself can be an expression of respect and reverence. When matchmakers hand over gifts, it should be done with special care and respect. For example, a gift is handed over with both hands or, if necessary, with a bow. Hand gestures, such as extending a hand or presenting a gift with a bow, are important non-verbal signals of respect and recognition of the recipient’s status. In the matchmaking ritual (*kuda tusu*) (құда түсу), the Kazakh people use many aspects of non-verbal communication that are of great importance in conveying respect, establishing a connection between families, and demonstrating cultural values. Non-verbal communication in matchmaking is important not only for expressing respect, but also for observing traditions and demonstrating the social status of the participants.

It is worth noting, however, that silence is often used as a means of conveying emotion during the matchmaking process. It can be a sign that the parties respect each other and allow time for reflection or decision-making. Pauses in conversation can also be important. They create space for the importance of the moment to register, and can serve to allow the parties to think before saying something important. Gestures of respect for parents and elders – during matchmaking, elders often rise from their seats when the parents of the bride or groom enter the room or make an important statement. This gesture expresses respect and emphasizes the importance of the presence of older family members. During conversation, modest silence or saying “with respect” are also non-verbal expressions of respect. For example, young people tend not to interrupt their elders but listen attentively and respond with dignity.

In Kalmyk culture, there is a traditional order at the table where each person's status is important. Older relatives sit next to the heads of families, symbolizing respect and agreement among the elders with the decision. Additionally, for example, a designated space for the bride and groom can be symbolically set aside, emphasizing their importance in the matchmaking process.

It should be noted that gifts and their presentation also carry their own non-verbal symbolism. When presenting gifts, families often do so in a special manner – with bows or polite gestures, which reflects the level of respect and seriousness of intentions. Gifts accompanied by expressions of gratitude or humility show that the parties recognize the importance and responsibility of the event. Thus, in Kalmyk culture, when matchmaking, not only is the symbolism of dishes important, but also non-verbal communication. Special dishes, such as kumys (кумыс), beshbarmak (бешбармак), and dairy products, play a key role in conveying symbols of health, abundance, well-being, and procreation. Non-verbal communication, in turn, helps to emphasize respect, the seriousness of intentions, and the status of the participants in this important ritual.

The exchange of gifts during matchmaking in Kazakh and Kalmyk cultures performs similar functions, serving as a means of expressing respect, confirming the intentions of the parties, and establishing interfamily ties. In both ethnocultural contexts, gift-giving has a symbolic meaning and is accompanied by the transfer of valuable items from the groom's family to the bride's family. At the same time, in the Kazakh tradition, the matchmaking ritual has a clear structure and includes established stages, such as “kuda tusu” (күдә түсу) and “syrga salu” (сырға салу), where significant attributes are earrings for the bride and obligatory gifts for her relatives. In Kalmyk culture, this process is less regulated, but also involves the exchange of gifts, often represented by cattle or items of traditional crafts, which reflects the nomadic past and Buddhist values of the people. Thus, despite the commonality of functions and symbolism of gifts, differences appear in the degree of formalization of the ritual and the types of gifts.

Conclusion

The exchange of gifts during matchmaking among the Kazakh and Kalmyk peoples is an important part of the traditional ritual process and carries deep symbolism. This phenomenon not only reflects

social and cultural characteristics but also plays an important role in establishing ties between families, clans, and even entire communities. The exchange of gifts during matchmaking among the Kazakhs is not just a material act, but an important ritual that has special meaning and symbolism.

The exchange of gifts at the matchmaking stage has several meanings:

The first, a sign of respect and recognition: gifts serve as a symbol of respect for the other party. These are not just material things, but a symbol of mutual respect, the value of the future union, and the willingness to support and help the bride's family.

Secondly, strengthening the relationship between clans: in traditional Kazakh society, clan ties play a vital role. Gifts during matchmaking are a way to strengthen the relationship not only between the groom and the bride, but also between the two families and their clans. This strengthens social and clan ties, forming a long-term union.

Thirdly, confirmation of the seriousness of intentions: giving gifts demonstrates the readiness of the parties to create a family, showing that they are serious. This is a kind of confirmation from both parties that they are ready to invest in the future union.

Gifts serve as a form of initiation and conclusion to an agreement. These can be both material gifts and symbolic ones, such as vows and promises made by the groom or bride. To some extent, gifts help to secure the obligations of the parties in a future marriage.

Gifts were also a symbol of promises made in a future marriage. For example, horses could symbolize protection, cattle – stability, and weapons – strength and readiness to protect. Gifts in the form of expensive fabrics, jewelry, and other valuables also emphasized the material status of the parties, demonstrating that the union would be secured and family life would be stable.

The exchange of gifts can also be seen as a blessing from parents to their daughter and future daughter-in-law, as well as to the newlyweds. Gifts can serve as a form of blessing for a happy and prosperous life.

The phenomenon of exchanging gifts during matchmaking among both the Kazakh and Kalmyk people has a deep cultural and social meaning. These are not just material gifts, but symbols of respect, harmony, prosperity, and readiness to create a union. Gifts exchanged during the matchmaking process emphasize the importance of the union being concluded and serve as a basis for strengthening ties between clans and families.

In these cultures, matchmaking gifts were indeed divided based on the age and status of the relatives, as well as the social position of the parties. This aspect of gift exchange reflected the hierarchical relationships within the family and clans, as well as the correspondence of material values to the level of responsibility and role that family members played in the matchmaking process.

Gifts from the groom's parents were most often of significant material value. They included livestock (horses, sheep), bride price (калым), money, as well as fabrics and expensive items that symbolized status and willingness to support the young family. These gifts were often of higher value, as they came from the main representatives of the family – the groom's parents. The bride's parents could also give gifts, although they were usually less materially valuable than gifts from the groom's parents. They could include various household items that symbolized support and wishes for happiness for the newlyweds, but more traditionally, such gifts were perceived as less significant in their value.

Gifts tended to differ based on age, for example, older relatives (grandparents, uncles, aunts) gave gifts that reflected their respect and role in the family, such gifts were less materially significant than gifts from parents but also had symbolic value. They could include household items, jewelry, as well as cultural and religious items. Younger relatives (for example, the brothers and sisters of the bride or groom) also participated in gift exchange, but their gifts most often symbolized more personal relationships and were less significant in terms of economic value.

They could include various accessories, personal items, and handicrafts.

In addition, gifts were also based on the status of the lineage. Depending on the status of the lineage, gifts could vary significantly in material value. For example, families from higher social strata (such as wealthy nomads or influential clans) could offer more expensive and valuable gifts, including large livestock, gold jewelry, or substantial sums of money. Families on lower social levels limited themselves to more modest gifts, such as sheep, fabrics, and other household items.

The main reasons for the division of gifts were the social status and respect for the recipient. The division of gifts based on the status and age of relatives served to demonstrate respect and confirm the seriousness of the intentions of the parties. The higher the social status of the family or the older relatives, the more significant and valuable their gifts were.

Gifts from older family members and clans often held greater significance in the context of establishing obligations and confirming one's position within the clan and social hierarchy. While younger relatives could give more symbolic, but still important gifts for strengthening personal and family ties.

Gifts from the parents of the bride and groom depended primarily on their financial security. Richer families could afford gifts of a higher level, which also served as an indicator of their ability to provide for the future well-being of the young family.

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