



Article

Multicultural Society of Kyrgyzstan: Analysis of the Legal Aspects of Traditional Kyrgyz Society, Socio-Cultural Development of Rural Tatars, and the Evolution of the Ethnic Identity of Koreans

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze the multiculturalism of Kyrgyz society on the example of three ethnic communities of Kyrgyzstan, with an emphasis on their development and formation in the context of modern social and political changes in Central Asia. The study covers the key stages of the development of Kyrgyz, Tatars, and Koreans, including their interaction and adaptation in the context of globalization and urbanization. Special attention is paid to the issues of preserving ethnic identity and socio-cultural adaptation in various environments. An explanation of the term "multiculturalism" was given, its appearance and its importance for modern post-industrial society were investigated. The study examines the key periods of the three communities, their development and the prerequisites for their appearance in the region under study. In addition, the study covers the issues of socio-cultural adaptation of ethnic minorities in rural and urbanized environments and changes in their identity under the influence of globalization and modernization. The development of multiculturalism in Kyrgyz society depends on a combination of legal reforms and cultural initiatives that contribute to the preservation of ethnic identity and the integration of various communities. The results of the study show that the multicultural society of Kyrgyzstan was formed under the influence of complex historical, social, and political processes. Tatars and Koreans, despite forced resettlement and assimilation, have preserved their cultural traditions and ethnic identity. The Kyrgyz, in turn, have actively integrated into a multi-ethnic society, preserving elements of their culture.

Keywords education, globalization, religion, Turkic peoples, urbanization

Suggested citation:

Naralieva, D., Bikbulatova, S., Kim, N., Bikbulatova, A., & Karyeva, A. (2025). Multicultural Society of Kyrgyzstan: Analysis of the Legal Aspects of Traditional Kyrgyz Society, Socio-Cultural Development of Rural Tatars, and the Evolution of the Ethnic Identity of Koreans. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(1), 472-497. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7i1.200>

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Introduction

The problem of the study was the lack of understanding of how changes in legal systems and socioeconomic conditions affect the integration and adaptation of various ethnic groups in Central Asia. The difficulty was also presented by the lack of comprehensive studies combining legal aspects with cultural transformation, especially in migrations and their consequences for ethnic identity.

In the globalized world of the 21st century, there is an increasing need to investigate cultural interactions and the impact of cultural diversity on the development of society. Kyrgyzstan, as one of the countries of Central Asia, is characterized by a complex ethnic structure, where, along with the indigenous Kyrgyz, live other ethnic groups, in particular, Tatars, Uzbeks, Russians, Ukrainians, Koreans, etc. Each of these groups has unique cultural traditions that influence the formation of the overall picture of the country's national identity. The problem of the identity of the Korean diaspora in Central Asia attracts the attention of researchers because of its complex evolution in the context of historical and cultural changes. Kim (2005) examined the self-identification of Koreans in Central Asia through the concepts of "*korjyo saram*" and "*Choson saram*", tracing how they have transformed in modern South Korean speech and scientific literature. The problem of reviewing the Korean diaspora in Central Asia is becoming increasingly important in the context of globalization and migration processes. Reckel and Schatz (2021) conducted an extensive study on the Korean diaspora, analyzing its spread and adaptation in Central Asia and beyond its borders. The author stressed that the migration of Koreans has influenced their cultural identity, especially in the context of relations with the region's indigenous peoples. The study also highlights the importance of socioeconomic factors influencing Koreans' integration into new societies. Fumagalli (2021) investigated differences in the perception of identity between generations of Koreans in Bishkek, revealing how older and younger generations adapt to changes in national and cultural conditions.

Globalization and its impact on nomadic communities are also relevant for Kyrgyzstan. Botokanova et al. (2024) focus on changes in the consciousness of nomads, suggesting a harmonious combination of traditions and innovations to preserve cultural identity. This approach provides a better understanding of how nomadic communities adapt to modern challenges. The relationship between religion and ethnicity in Central Asia and the role of the Tatars in the revolutionary events of Central Asia were considered by Naganawa (2023), who focused on their contribution to the political changes in the region in the early 1920s. Despite the perception of Tatars as "*outsiders*", they played an important role in transforming social and political

structures. Rural communities' socioeconomic and cultural development is also important for understanding the evolution of ethnic identity in Kyrgyzstan. Bagautdinova (2020) analyzed historical processes and their impact on the Tatar community, showing how they preserved their cultural identity in the face of social changes.

Botokanova investigated the legal aspects of traditional Kyrgyz society and their impact on gender roles (2022). The author showed how the norms of the Adat strengthened patriarchal structures and formed gender relations, which is especially important in the legal regulation of the roles of men and women in traditional society. The problem of migration and its impact on the linguistic identity of Koreans in Central Asia is considered by Ahn (2019). The researcher analyses how changes in linguistic identity have contributed to the adaptation of the Korean community to new cultural conditions, which helps to understand the process of preserving the linguistic culture of migrants. Pohl (2018) investigated the Stalinist repressions and their impact on the resettlement of the Korean diaspora from the Far East to Central Asia. The author shows how these historical events influenced the identity of Koreans forced to adapt to new conditions.

Despite a substantial amount of research on ethnic diversity and cultural aspects of Kyrgyzstan's development, specific gaps remain that require further study. The current challenges faced by ethnic communities, in particular, Tatars and Koreans, have not been examined deeply enough, especially in the context of the impact of globalization and modern political changes. The gender aspects of traditional Kyrgyz society have been investigated in fragments, without a sufficient comparative perspective with other Central Asian regions. This creates the need for a more detailed analysis of the role of women and gender relations in various ethnic groups. In addition, the interaction between different ethnic groups, such as Tatars, Koreans, and Kyrgyz, requires additional research regarding their socio-cultural development and integration into modern Kyrgyz society.

The purpose of this study was a comprehensive analysis of the impact of cultural diversity on the formation of the national identity of Kyrgyzstan, with an emphasis on the role of ethnic groups such as Tatars and Koreans in modern society. The main tasks were examining the impact of globalization on the cultural identity of Kyrgyz, Tatars, and Koreans and determining multiculturalism's role in forming modern identity in Kyrgyzstan in the context of growing secularization and the influence of external cultural factors.

Methodology

The study used an integrated approach to determine multiculturalism in Kyrgyzstan. It was divided into several stages. The first stage aimed to explore the ethnogenesis of three cultural communities of Tatars, Koreans, and Kyrgyz, explain ethnonyms, and identify the historical context of formation in their dominant regions. The next stage was to investigate the migration problems of Tatars and Koreans, determine the reasons that forced these ethnic groups or parts of ethnic groups to change their place of residence, and what goals the communities of Tatars and Koreans pursued to settle in the region under study.

An explanation of their economic activity and how it manifested before and after coming to Kyrgyzstan was given. The last stage of the study was to determine how three societies, namely Tatars, Kyrgyz, and Koreans, joined the Kyrgyz multicultural society or preserved their identity, the self-identification of their descendants, and the relationship of these three ethnic groups. In addition, the analysis of the influence of legal and socio-cultural factors on the multicultural society of Kyrgyzstan was used.

The analysis of legal aspects, the development of Tatars, and the problems of the evolution of ethnic identity among Koreans was conducted. Historical data and current trends were compared to assess how changes in the legal system and social environment affected different ethnic groups. This approach allowed for the identification of similar and different trends in the development of these groups compared to other multicultural societies and the determination of the specific features of the Kyrgyz context. The socio-cultural development of Tatars and Koreans in Kyrgyzstan in the context of changes in their identities and legal status was conducted by analyzing everyday life. In addition, an analysis of the linguistic interaction of Kyrgyz, Tatars, and Koreans about origin and kinship was conducted. The analysis of the influence of cultural practices and symbols on the formation and preservation of identity in conditions of forced displacement was also conducted. It was examined how cultural elements and symbols form the collective memory of individuals and determine their social status in a multicultural context. Statistical data on the social and cultural characteristics of representatives of different ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan were collected and analyzed. The population censuses conducted during the Russian Empire in 1916 and conducted by the Soviet government in 1959 and 1989 were reviewed (Darskii & Andreev, 1991). The statistical data obtained allowed for the identification of trends in social integration. In addition, an analysis of the legal systems of Kyrgyzstan and other multicultural countries, particularly the United States and Canada, was conducted, which allowed assessing the uniqueness of the

Kyrgyz context and identifying the features of the legal integration of ethnic minorities. The study also examined photographs, videos, and other visual materials (Kurmanalieva & Crewett, 2019) related to the lives of the ethnic groups under study. These data helped to understand how ethnic groups present their identity through visual images and how these images affect perceptions inside and outside communities.

Results

The term “*multiculturalism*” has different meanings and defines various phenomena. Multiculturalism is understood as a scientific concept, a theoretical construct, a specific discourse about cultural differences and attitudes towards them, a practical situation in societies with heterogeneous ethnic and national structures, a policy of integrating minorities into society, and a strategy for managing ethnic and cultural exchanges. The essence of multiculturalism can be defined by the formula “*unity in diversity*” (Kim, 2005). Multiculturalism as a doctrine of various ethnic and national policies was officially proclaimed in Australia, Canada, and the USA in the 1970s. Each of these countries has tried to solve its specific problems in this way.

However, all countries that have fully or partially introduced multiculturalism aim to ensure social harmony and integration of ethnically and culturally diverse societies. Multiculturalism was only a renaming of a process understood in terms of ethnic revival since the 1960s (Novozhenov, 2023; Bedelbayeva et al., 2024). The category “culture” replaced “ethnicity” because it offered a broader and softer formula for modern conflict societies. Thus, structural problems were recoded as “cultural” (Manalu et al., 2024).

Attempts to avoid forced assimilation and integrate people more successfully into society have led to the development of a multicultural society (Doszhan, 2023; Auanasova & Auanassova, 2024). A multicultural society is not based on the hegemony of one culture but strives to ensure the equal existence of different cultures and the equal participation of the bearers of these cultures in public life (Daurenbekova et al., 2024; Shormakova et al., 2019). The Canadian political philosopher Kymlicka (2001) defines multiculturalism as an offshoot of liberalism. In other words, he believes that inequality in the social status of representatives of different ethnic groups in society is not taken for granted.

It is believed that the doctrine of multiculturalism, known as the “*Canadian mosaic*”, arose primarily because of the conflict between the English-speaking and French-speaking populations. However, its primary purpose is related to the need to

solve the problems of ethnic minorities, who increasingly seek to correct social inequality (Asankanov, 2023).

The Kyrgyz community

There is no ancient legend about the origin of the ethnonym “кыргыз” (Kyrgyz). In medieval legends, the ethnonym is associated with the mythical “40 women” (кырк plus the prefix киз). Researchers have rejected this popular theory, but there is no single conclusion. Some believe that this ethnonym consists of the number “кырк” (forty) with the addition of the plural suffix “оф”, that is, “40 people, 40 tribes”. Another theory is that it comes from the ancient Turkic adjective “кириг,” which translates as red + “из” (red hair, red people).

There are many other theories, but none of them are generally accepted. Notably, the ancient Turkic and Mongolian peoples were joined by the Uzbek, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz, who formed from the 15th to the 18th century. As a result, close family ties have developed between the three Turkic peoples of Central Asia. An important stage in the formation of the Kyrgyz state was the unification of all tribes into two “wings”. The On Kanat (right wing) included the large tribes of Sarybagysh, Bug, Sayak, Solto, Bagysh, Balin, Basizov, Cherikov, Zorov, Biorov, Bargov, and Karabagish. They occupied territories in the north of Kyrgyzstan. The Sol Kanat (left wing) included Kush, Sar, Munduz, Setidar, Kita, Chonbagish, and Bashish.

The third group of Kyrgyz tribes was called Ichkkilik and included Kygachaks, Naimans, Tai, Kesek, Eksaks, Kangis, Neigts, and Dayors. These three associations included Kyrgyz and Mongols on equal terms. All the tribes included in the new administrative and military system became known by the common ethnic name “Kyrgyz”. This important event in the history of the Tien Shan occurred in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Since that time, the beginning of the formation of the Kyrgyz ethnic group in the Tien Shan can be stated. The traditional economy of Kyrgyzstan – cattle breeding, agriculture, hunting, and crafts – involves centuries-old skills that have left a conservative imprint on a lifestyle that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. The Kyrgyz were known as skilled hunters. They hunted with traps, guns, and birds of prey. Some tended cattle, and others collected raw materials to make felt and leather or to sew clothes. No social division of labor and an independent craft, separated from home production. At the end of the 19th century, small-scale production developed, and small artisans appeared.

The Kyrgyz themselves were not supporters of trade. In cities, trade was sometimes replaced by monetary transactions, but the use of money was negligible. Most Kyrgyz were simple shepherds called bucars (Shershova & Chaika, 2024). At the

top of the hierarchy of Kyrgyz society were Beys (Tagai Bey, Atakes Bey, etc.) in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and later, from the middle of the 19th century, Manaps. Kyrgyzstan had a patriarchal system of slavery. Captives who were penniless and owed money to the tribe were enslaved. The foundations of traditional nomadic life, associated with extensive pastoral economic activity, played an important role in forming the Kyrgyz people's spiritual and stereotypical worldview and identity. Human dependence on the environment and the figurative expression of unity with specific parts of the natural and geographical environment played an important role in forming the spiritual and stereotypical Kyrgyz worldview and identity (Osmonova et al., 2021).

Generally, the territory's inhabitants' social and moral meanings and ideas give rise to specific styles, patterns of attitude and understanding, and business structures. Symbolism can be considered as one of the characteristics of traditional systems of thought. "Тенгри" (sky) is a symbol of eternity and spiritual height, the symbol "Умаен" represents the source of human life, animals symbolize the origin of birth, and the ancestral symbol symbolizes historical continuity. The ancestor symbol symbolizes the historical continuity of generations of Kyrgyz people. In particular, the existence of the Kyrgyz ancestor cult, in which seven fathers are said to be known, is a mnemonic tradition and is not only a factor in family consolidation, family survival, and ethnic survival but also evidence of stable historical continuity (Serikzhanova et al., 2024).

Therewith, for representatives of a particular clan or tribe, the unity of all community members was recognized as the main element of life, preserving the social organization's peculiarity and conservatism. The basic rules were mandatory mutual assistance, the distribution of roles for each community member, and a coordinated and collective life. Nomadic communities (номады) provided a certain degree of protection and security to Kyrgyz ethnic communities (Semashko, 2020). The ethnic community is a group of people with one or more common names and cultural elements. Common elements have a common myth (version) of origin and, therefore, only a shared historical memory. They are associated with certain geographical regions and may indicate group solidarity. Traditional forms of Kyrgyz social organization that have survived today are tribal and Ailu communities, which were formed based on family and kindred groups (Auanasova et al., 2025; Kieliszek, 2024). Joint organization of important events and mandatory financial support are widely practiced in communities. There is also the labor participation of Ashars, or Aylu members, strengthening blood ties (Yaldız, 2022).

The blood ties that underlie identity substantially impact the development of collectivism, mutual assistance, and a sense of community (Kushenova et al., 2025; Pancer-Cybulska & Zlenko, 2024). The underdevelopment of industrial relations and the limited nature of the tribal organization of life determined the special, collectivist rules of the hostel and the corresponding communal identity, subordinating individuals to their developed values. Thereby, tribes, as subjects of collective ownership of land, livestock, and property, organized material mutual assistance and physical mutual protection from external threats. The tribes had their leaders, adapted new members to their structures, developed tribal beliefs, and a strong sense of belonging to the tribe, which was reflected in the common name.

The religious beliefs of the Kyrgyz people were reinforced by strict observance of the age-old tradition of honoring the spirits of nature, deceased ancestors, and the ashes of the famous *aqsaqal* (Efremov, 2025; Francelino et al., 2024). Social experience is passed on, ancestors are revered in the family, and their importance gradually spreads to the community. In Kyrgyzstan, ancestors are important to the community (Layugan, 2024). Under the influence of external factors, appeals to the spirits of the ancestors began to strengthen and weaken, acquiring higher and more open forms of praise at different levels. A characteristic aspect of the revival of ethnocultural traditions is that they acquire a regional characteristic, since certain regions' representatives often influence people's attitudes towards historical events and figures.

The socio-cultural and historical continuity of traditions arising from tribal social organization is an important element of the lifestyle, socialization, and ethnic identity of Kyrgyzstan. Returning to ancestral roots and origins strengthens the process of people's desire to know their ancestors up to the seventh generation. The social organization of the rich and complex ethnocultural complex of tribes has developed over various historical periods. The preservation of tribal structures within a single state is a rare phenomenon (Biard, 2018). The gene pool of the Kyrgyz nation has absorbed the biological potential of many clans and tribes representing various racial and ethnic groups (Adrienne, 2023). Since the highlands were the primary habitat of the Kyrgyz, large-scale cattle breeding and primitive agriculture were practiced there, which required joint management. Psychological reasons include the fact that kinship and tribal ties are significant for Kyrgyz people. Kyrgyz attach great moral and educational importance to tribes. The sense of duty to the tribe (туганчилик) that the Kyrgyz developed, which allowed them to survive in harsh conditions, is undoubtedly reinforced by their tribal identity and is important in shaping their character and worldview (Cao, 2024).

Strict observance of tribal honor and dignity is a powerful moral support, without which Kyrgyz people do not lose themselves (Dobrovolska et al., 2025; Shekhovtsova, 2020). However, the division into tribes and the associated stereotypes of individual and group isolation strengthen tribalist social relations (Nikolaeva, 2024). Today, the desire to return to ancestral roots often threatens the ethnic and national identity of the Kyrgyz, prone to tribalism. Kyrgyz tribalism was distinguished by the ability to integrate within tribes, and more often clans, but in general, on a national scale, this ability has the opposite meaning. This is since the interests and needs of tribes and clans, in the narrow understanding that tribalism gives, often do not coincide with the interests of the state or the nation. The revival of tribal division in Kyrgyzstan, people's search for belonging to a clan or tribe, and longing for their founder have shocked the country (Simpson, 2023).

In the 21st century, Kyrgyzstan is divided into clans. There is a "cold war" between the clans (Almakuchukov et al., 2024), each trying to push as many representatives as possible into their organizations and authorities. In short, intertribal struggle escalates in all spheres of Kyrgyzstan's socioeconomic, political, and cultural life, as in the pre-revolutionary past. Despite the social transformations that took place in the 20th and early 21st centuries, the nature of ethnicity and ethnos in Kyrgyzstan has undergone substantial changes; elements of ethnicity, ethnic lifestyle, and identity remain in the 21st century. Another key characteristic of Kyrgyz as an ethno-social community is intolerance towards Russians and Uzbeks, even despite all their multiculturalism and government policies, relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are very tense (Ash, 2022). In 2010, about 500 people died in such interethnic clashes, and such tension in society is observed in 2020, especially in the problematic situation in the southern regions of the country.

The Tatar community

Tatars are Turkic people who live for the most part in the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Researchers argue about the origin of the Tatars. At the beginning of the 21st century, several theories of their origin were developed, most likely Mongolian, Bulgarian, and Kipchak. Despite the disputes between researchers, the Tatars mostly lived in the steppe regions of Asia and were conquered by the Mongols in the 12th and 13th centuries. During this period, the Tatars formed as a separate ethnic group within the empire of Genghis Khan, and soon became part of the Golden Horde (Aktaş, 2021).

After the collapse of the Golden Horde, the Tatars divided into several ethnocultural groups. The largest were the Crimean Tatars, Volga Tatars, and Siberian

Tatars. These three Tatar communities developed separately, alienating them from the common Tatar ethnic group. Researchers have concluded that all three groups developed separately and have common ancestors. The largest migrations to the territory of Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan occurred from the territory of Siberia, but a substantial part also migrated from the Volga region to escape recruitment. The process of formation of the Tatar diaspora in Kyrgyzstan can be divided into three main periods: before the annexation by the Russian Empire, after the annexation by the Russian Empire, and the Soviet period.

Since the reign of Peter the Great, Russia has been showing interest in Central Asia and the East. Tatar merchants showed even greater interest in Central Asia and the East. They were used to expand business ties and establish trade relations. During the reign of Catherine II, the Tatars enjoyed special privileges in foreign trade with the Central Asian states. Knowing the language and culture was necessary to establish contacts with the local population. The Russian government used Tatars, who were culturally much closer to the inhabitants of this region than the Slavs. At first, they were used as ordinary translators, and very often, the local population was distrustful of Russian merchants. Hence, the merchants always took Tatars with them or put the caravans under their control, which, in most cases, saved them from being plundered.

Later, the Russian authorities also used Tatars who traded in Central Asia to establish diplomatic relations with the region's inhabitants. Tatars were involved in many Russian missions in Central Asia (not only in Kyrgyzstan). Their work was no less important and substantial than that of representatives of diplomatic and trade missions in the East. In the 19th century, many Tatars came here who settled near trade routes, and the government reduced the tax for Muslims to 2.5% instead of the standard 5%. Mullahs also moved here, whom the preachers called "*wandering mullahs*", who preached the religious movement of Sufism. They came here not only as missionaries but also to escape from recruitment. The "runaway Russian Tatars" contribution to improving literacy was very substantial; they raised the literacy rate of the younger generation of Kyrgyz and Kazakhs by almost 30 per cent. Tatars, caravan guides, translators, and mullahs began settling in the region and gradually settled in trading cities like *Karakol* and *Pishpek* (Mambetaliev, 2023).

It is known that they were part of the urban population and other ethnic groups. By that time, many Tatar merchants were already quite wealthy. They created their own companies and guilds. In the 1860s, Tatars, artisans, and peasants settled with Uzbeks near the destroyed Kokand fortresses. This was due to the growth of commodity-monetary relations and sales markets. Artisans among the Tatars produced leather, metal, wood, and jewelry. After Kyrgyzstan joined the Russian

Empire, the question arose of restricting the Tatars to oust them from the trade system and simultaneously reduce their influence on the local population.

Thus, since 1886, the benefits granted to Russian immigrants to the Tatars have not applied. The Tatar population was also provided by natural growth. Thus, by the beginning of the 20th century, Tatars occupied a substantial role in Kyrgyz society, and many were skilled workers. Schools were often set up at madrassas where Tatars taught Kyrgyz literacy. With the advent of Soviet power in the territory of the former Russian Empire, the influx of Tatars to Kyrgyzstan increased. This was due to the policy of dispossession and mass starvation in Ukraine and the Volga region. After the beginning of the industrialization of Kyrgyzstan, the influx of Tatars and their substantial urbanization continued. This was due to the concentration of industries near cities. From 1926 to 1939, the number of Tatars in cities increased exponentially. In Kyzyl-Kiya, the number of Tatars has increased 10 times, and in the city of Osh, 11 times. The urbanization of Tatars was slower in the north of the country, where the urban population was slower than in the south. On average, the population increased 2-2.5 times (Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2022).

Since 1991, the number of Tatars has begun to decrease. Initially, the central area of activity of the Tatars was trade. However, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the formation of capitalist relations in Russia opened new opportunities for the Tatars. As a result, Tatars have become active participants in Russian business, trading, and remittance activities in Russia's main economic centers. Notably, the tsarist authorities (after the annexation of the Kyrgyz lands to Russia in 1876) banned the resettlement of Muslim Tatars from the Volga region. A way out of this situation has been found. Wealthy Tatars bought real estate under fictitious names and developed active entrepreneurial activities. One of them was the Tatar merchant class, which traditionally existed in Bukhara, Kokand, and other large cities of modern Central Asia. Immigrants formed the other group from the Volga Tatars. Due to the Volga Tatars, along with traditional trading activities, enterprises for processing agricultural products and producing consumer goods were established where Tatars lived compactly.

Tatars sold, rented, and provided services (Tulenbergenova et al., 2024). About 3% of working Tatars were engaged in producing and distributing electricity, gas, and water. Only 4% of Tatars worked in public administration. About 1.5% were employed in the mining industry. The Tatars have always attached great importance to knowledge and education for various objective and subjective reasons. A comparison of the educational level of Tatars who migrated to Kyrgyzstan at the end of the 19th century shows that their educational level was higher than that of the locals and the

Turkic-speaking population (Bagautdinova, 2020). During the Soviet period, the level of education tended to increase. In a regional context, due to the specific features of the settlement and employment of Tatars, most received secondary and vocational education in the south.

In contrast, many received higher education in the north of Kyrgyzstan. This difference can be explained by the fact that in Soviet times, the mining industry was concentrated in the south, where Tatars were employed as workers and engineers and received secondary vocational education. In the north, the employment of Tatars was more widespread, and highly educated specialists prevailed among them (Naganawa, 2023).

Illiterate Tatars were a minority (0.5%). Most of them were over 70 years old. More than a third of Tatars (35.6%) had completed secondary education, and about 10% had primary and secondary education. At the beginning of 2009, the population of the Kyrgyz Republic was 5,276,000 (Table 1).

Table 1. Population of Kyrgyzstan according to the 2009 census

Region	Kyrgyz people	Russians	Tatars
Batken	328.500	4.100	2.100
Jalal-Abad	708.600	9.300	4.000
Issyk-Kul	368.200	37.500	2.100
Naryn	268.400	302	200
Osh	742.600	1.800	1.500
Talas	201.500	4.800	341
Chui	412.900	175.700	7.163
Bishkek City	523.700	199.300	13.400
Osh City	119.500	6.600	2.700

Source: compiled by the authors based on the Kyrgyzstan – Population Census 2009 (2018).

Nationalities as a percentage of the total population were distributed as follows. Kyrgyz – 69.6%, Russians – 8.4%, Tatars – 0.6%, Uzbeks – 20.8%, Kazakhs, Turks, Ukrainians, Chinese – 0.6%. Since 2017, one can see an increasingly active migration of Tatars from the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Migration could be voluntary or forced. Voluntary migration has contributed to the development of the population, the expansion of horizons, and cultural growth. Forced migration usually occurs in search of work and is associated with a change of residence.

Worldwide, 3% of the population (195 million) are forced to leave their homeland simply because they cannot find work inside the country: 5,044 Tatars left the republic between 2003 and 2005 (Dadabaev, 2021). The outflow of migrants equals the difference between the number of Tatars who arrived in the republic and the number of Tatars who left the republic. Between 2003 and 2007, the largest outflow of

Tatars occurred in the Issyk-Kul (8,119), Jalal-Abad (1,014), Chui (746), Bishkek (1,077), and Osh (1,077) regions. The most significant number of emigrants was women (2,008), and most of the immigrants were people of working age (1,535).

The Korean community

By 1937, there were practically no Koreans in Central Asia. However, this migration took place in three stages. The first two stages occurred during the Russian Empire, and the third was under Soviet rule. The first stage occurred at the end of the 19th century. In the second half of the 19th century, Koreans voluntarily settled in tsarist Russia for work and better living conditions. However, very few Koreans emigrated to regions outside the Far East, such as the Central Asian regions of the Russian Empire, Turkestan, the Aral Sea, and the Caspian regions. The presence of Koreans in modern Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan was recorded during the first census of the Russian Empire in 1897.

Koreans had more opportunities for cultural adaptation and interethnic exchange in the steppe regions and Turkestan than in the Far East. Koreans in Primorsky Krai, as a rule, lived in dense communities. Koreans (and Chinese) settled in separate territories in the south of Primorye. In the steppe regions, they were mainly engaged in wool felting. They also sold jewelry, paper flowers, and tobacco products. Koreans also maintained laundries in various cities. A special registration document of the Ministry of Internal Affairs notes that “most Koreans worked honestly, could not say anything bad, supported themselves and their families exclusively with work and got used to Russian living conditions” (Kim, 2005). The adoption of Russian surnames, Orthodoxy, and interethnic marriages were manifestations of cultural adaptation. According to Kim, the second stage of the settlement of Koreans in Central Asia is associated with the Russian-Japanese War of 1904-1905. On the eve of and during the war, the Russian authorities, along with other Asian peoples, took measures to resettle Koreans from the border areas deep into the empire, especially to Western Russia, where they were administratively settled.

During the first All-Union population census in 1926, 87 Koreans were recorded in the region, 45 in the Kazakh SSR, 36 in the Uzbek SSR, and 9 in the Kyrgyz SSR. The third stage of Korean migration (rice farmers) to Central Asia occurred in the late 20s. At that time, Kazakhstan became the epicenter of rice cultivation. Kazakhstan has taken on the enormous task of minimizing rice imports and meeting the region's needs. This task was to provide the Central Asian region and the European part of the Soviet Union with rice. After testing varieties from Turkestan, Ferghana, Bukhara, Korea, Japan, China, and Europe, it was concluded that “*Korean, Japanese, and coastal*

varieties dominate". Priority was given to the Far Eastern style, and 100 out of 220 Koreans (117 families) were sent to Kazakhstan. The People's Committee of Agriculture of Kyrgyzstan also planned to invite a group of farmers from South Korea. However, in 1930, the Kyrgyz authorities refused to accept Korean rice farmers due to the abrupt curtailment of the resettlement program in the republic and a reduction in funds allocated for resettlement activities. In 1937, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan in Soviet Central Asia were to receive about 200,000 Korean immigrants from the Far East. Central Asia consists of uninhabitable steppes, deserts, semi-deserts, and mountain ranges.

The decision to deport came as a surprise, given the region's low infrastructure level, the shortage of housing, and the catastrophic shortage of material resources and health services. These Central Asian republics were not ready to accept the deported Koreans from Central Asia. Koreans from the Far East, whom Stalin considered "*unreliable*", were forcibly deported. Some Koreans were even told that settling in Central Asia's depths would be better, where they would not be involved in international politics. This is better than living in poverty in the border regions and continuing to be accused of espionage. However, having abandoned their dreams when faced with cold, lack of housing, hunger, and disease, migrants had to fight an uphill struggle for survival (Pohl, 2018).

Resettlement based on nationality had to be accompanied by appropriate administrative, logistical, and financial support. However, preparations for the resettlement of internally displaced persons were highly unsatisfactory. Koreans who left their property in the Far East were promised compensation upon arrival. In fulfilling this obligation, theft and non-payment occurred frequently. The first problem faced by internally displaced persons was the lack of housing. They had to prepare their homes for the coming winter and were forced to winter in shacks, shelters, roofs, stables, and abandoned buildings (Rodriguez, 2023).

However, internally displaced persons were gradually settling in. Koreans settled in 11 republics (Table 2). There were many deviations from the original plan during the Korean resettlement process. At first, in 1937, the number of neighborhoods with a mixed local population was seven, but later by 1959, this number had increased to 44, of which only 17 were inhabited by Koreans. Another phenomenon that deserves attention is the second stage of resettlement – the emigration of Koreans, which took place after Stalin died in 1953.

Table 2. Settlement of Koreans in the republics of the USSR

Region	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989
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Kazakh SSR	96,453	74,019	78,078	91,984	103,315
Kyrgyz SSR	508	3,622	9,404	14,481	18,355
Latvian SSR	0	49	166	183	248
Lithuanian SSR	0	29	75	140	119
Moldavian SSR	0	99	106	212	269
RSFSR	11,462	91,445	101,369	97,649	107,051
Tajik SSR	43	2,365	8,490	11,179	13,431
Turkmen SSR	40	1,919	3,493	3,105	2,848
Uzbek SSR	72,944	138,453	151,059	163,062	183,140
Ukrainian SSR	845	1,341	4,480	6,061	8,669
Estonian SSR	0	40	96	103	202

Source: compiled by the authors based on Darskii and Andreev (1991).

This migration took place between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. There were two types of internal migration. The first is Koreans who migrated to cities for work, and people who migrated to rural areas as workers or employees. In addition to Koreans, another factor that worsened the financial situation of the local population was the constant arrival of new immigrants. In 1938, Kurds (802 families), Armenians (309 families), and Iranians (2,000 families) settled in Central Asia. Despite these difficulties, Koreans have progressed in agriculture and high labor productivity.

Korean peasant collective farms increased the area under rice and other grains and achieved high yields in producing new industrial crops such as cotton. High yields have also been achieved in producing new industrial crops such as kenaf and cotton. Most of the Korean society in the Far East consisted of people who emigrated from the Korean Peninsula after 1900, especially after the Japanese invasion of Korea (1910), and they were carriers of traditional Korean identity and the traditional Korean way of life. This formation process could not be completed within the framework of imperial Russia, as it had been going on since 1917. In Soviet Russia, it only continued. New traits were found, and being Orthodox was no longer required for adaptation. Moreover, religiosity was no longer welcomed by the new government. Political consciousness developed and changed rapidly, educational programs acquired new content and scale, and the age of marriage, behavioral patterns, and value orientations changed. A policy for developing domestic production accompanies the program for developing a market economy in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, in the post-Soviet period, there was migration of the population, mainly the Russian-speaking, and there was also a shortage of specialists. However, foreign trade relations with Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China remain active (Musayev et al., 2024).

According to the 2009 census (Dadabaev, 2021), the population of Kyrgyzstan was 5,362,793 people, of whom 70.9% were Kyrgyz, 14.3% were Uzbeks, and 7.8% were Russians. About 17,000 Koreans are concentrated in the capital, Bishkek, and the Chui

region. In imperial Russia, Koreans used the ethnic designations “корёо сапам” (Koreans of the Koryo region) and “чосон сапам” (Koreans of the Joseon country). When the Soviet Union arose, the term “*Soviet Koreans*” was used along with these ethnic names.

However, creating a new state, a political and legal act, does not imply a change in ethnic and cultural identity. In other words, in the early years of the existence of the Soviet state, the term “Soviet Korean” for most Koreans had only one meaning: to belong to this state legally. 1937 marked the beginning of a new stage in the transformation of Korean identity. It was the deportation that accompanied the final formation of Koreans as Soviet Koreans. The most important factors in this process were the complete transformation of the national school and the Korean training school in Soviet institutions, Russian-language education, incorporation into the Soviet-European educational system and rapid improvement of educational standards, full participation in the Soviet information space, urbanization, gradual resettlement throughout the Soviet Union, transformation of lifestyle and way of life, natural reduction of the first generations.

These processes led to a new generation of Koreans with qualitatively new socio-cultural characteristics, namely Soviet Koreans. The term “*Soviet Korean*” reflects the following characteristics: permanent residence on Soviet territory, the integration of Korean and Soviet cultures, and the Soviet worldview in general (Reckel & Schatz, 2021). “Soviet” is the name of the state, which refers to such phenomena as “Soviet culture” and “*Soviet ideology*”. Surely, where Koreans lived compactly in Kyrgyz “*Korean*” collective farms, the forms and rates of assimilation, preservation of traditional customs, the introduction of innovations, and transformation of ethnic consciousness and behaviors differed from how these processes took place in cities where Koreans were scattered (Radford, 2014).

In the urban environment, the transformation process was more dynamic, more profound, and more extensive; Koreans in the diaspora, who had lived in isolation from Korea for four to six generations, differed from Koreans in other regions in language, mentality, values, ideals, worldview, behavior, customs, and traditions, and Koreans in the West are already different from Koreans in other countries. However, in Western Europe and North America, the same processes Koreans have long experienced are now observed at the level of the first, second, and third generations of Korean immigrants. The differences between Koreans of Korean descent and Koreans of the former Soviet diaspora are so significant that they are the basis for defining new subethnic groups such as the “*Korean superethnos*”, “*Koreans of the CIS*”, and “*post-Soviet Koreans*” (Youngmin, 2022). In connection with the above-mentioned processes,

concern is often expressed that the ethnocultural identity of Koreans abroad, including Koreans, is experiencing a “*serious crisis*” in Korea. The distinctive culture of the Korean diaspora is a historically established reality that should be recognized and respected for what it is (Tomeyan 2023). From the standpoint of Koreans in the diaspora, there should be more than one people and one culture; going beyond the mono-ethnic, monocultural consciousness is not a disadvantage, but a virtue that opens other horizons of consciousness and worldview (Fumagalli, 2021). This allows them not only to relate themselves to the “*other*” (other cultures) but also to include the “*other*” in themselves as an organic element. At the same time, their consciousness becomes open and outward-looking. The interaction and interpenetration of cultures is one of the most important trends in the modern world.

Discussions

The study identified several important aspects of the interaction between legal systems, socio-cultural changes, and ethnic identity. The study’s main result was to highlight how these three people interacted with each other and how they preserved their identity; for example, the Tatars were more easily assimilated by the Kyrgyz. There are several reasons for this, the first of which is that, unlike Koreans, they did not live within the same area, but were scattered and, accordingly, had less contact with each other, which is why they lost their unique traditional culture. Therewith, they preserved the language because both Turks and Kyrgyz have a common origin, and the language and culture are quite similar, although they have differences. The situation was different with the Koreans since they were forcibly deported, and the preservation of identity faded into the background. Survival was the primary task; they had to adapt and adopt the language, not Kyrgyz, but Russian. A new sub ethnos of Koreans, the “*Soviet Koreans*”, arose; along with linguistic differences, they lost their names. Most Koreans of the present time have Russian names and Korean surnames, or vice versa, Korean names and Russian surnames, which has become their characteristic feature.

With the partial loss of identity, the Korean diaspora has long preserved traditional Korean clothes and, most importantly, Korean cuisine, which has even absorbed Kyrgyz cuisine, making it notable. For example, noodle dishes appeared in Kyrgyz traditional cuisine. Today, these are three separate nationalities, which, due to the policy of multiculturalism, were able to preserve their unique features.

The study drew attention to traditional legal norms, which continued to play an important role in rural areas, despite the influence of modern legal reforms. This conclusion coincides with the findings in the study by Koenig (1999), who noted that

traditional legal systems often persist in parallel with official legal systems in post-Soviet countries. However, the study adds a new aspect to this issue, showing that traditional legal norms in Kyrgyzstan are preserved and adapted to modern conditions, emphasizing their dynamism and importance in social relations. Breed and Iğmen (2020) investigated cultural transformations in Central Asia after the collapse of the USSR. The authors analyzed the influence of socialist heritage on the formation of national identities in three regions using an interdisciplinary approach. However, the work could be more complete if economic and political factors of influence were considered.

As for Koreans in Kyrgyzstan, the study's results, indicating the adaptation of their ethnic identity to new conditions, are consistent with the conclusions of Fumagalli (2021). The author described how Koreans adapt their identity to the conditions of post-Soviet Bishkek while preserving key cultural elements, as noted above. The result of the study complements these findings, showing that Koreans in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate a similar adaptability, which indicates general trends within diasporic communities.

Ahn (2019) investigated Koreans' linguistic roots and migration routes, pointing to the stability of their cultural identity in Central Asia. However, the fact that under the pressure of the repressive regime of the Soviet government during 1930-1945, Koreans assimilated quite strongly to survive in new conditions that were substantially different from those in the Far East was disregarded. On the other hand, there are substantial discrepancies with some of the conclusions of Williams (1998). The researcher stated that the Tatars' existential identity was formed under the strong influence of political conditions. In contrast, this study proved the opposite, that socio-cultural changes in Kyrgyzstan had a more substantial impact on the preservation and adaptation of the cultural identity of the Tatars. Radford (2014) emphasizes the importance of religious and ethnic identity in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Radford's conclusions show that religion and ethnicity are interrelated and important in social integration. It is not easy to disagree with these findings. However, it is worth adding a new aspect focusing on the legal and cultural factors that contribute to preserving Koreans and Tatars of their ethnic identity in a multicultural society. Biard (2018) investigated the influence of religious factors on forming a "*neo-ethnic*" identity in Kyrgyzstan. The study sheds light on religious changes and what a rethinking of ethnic identity can lead to. This partially coincides with the conclusions about the evolution of Korean identity in Kyrgyzstan. However, attention was also focused on rural Tatar communities' cultural and social development, which complements Biard's analysis.

Temirkoulov (2004) has created an important context for understanding the current challenges faced by ethnic communities by analyzing tribal and social conflicts in Kyrgyzstan. This study complements these aspects by deepening the understanding of how these conflicts affected the socio-cultural development of Tatars and Koreans in Kyrgyzstan. Adrienne (2023) devoted her paper to the interethnic marriages in Central Asia in the context of Soviet politics. The author focused on how such unions contributed to creating the “friendship of peoples” ideology and influenced social and cultural relations. However, the study is limited by the insufficient depth of analysis of some ethnic groups and their unique experiences.

The study identified the complex interactions between traditional legal systems, socio-cultural changes, and ethnic identity. One of the main results is the identification that traditional legal norms, although undergoing changes under the influence of modern legal reforms, still play an important role in social relations, especially in rural and remote areas. The results indicate that the preservation of the ethnic identity of the Tatars is critically important for their integration into Kyrgyz society. The evolution of the ethnic identity of Koreans in Kyrgyzstan has shown how globalization and social changes affect cultural identity.

Examining the migration processes of Tatars and Koreans to Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan revealed complex socioeconomic development and cultural integration of these ethnic groups. Tatars who migrated to Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries brought with them economic innovations in the field of processing agricultural products and a high level of education. Their economic activities included trade, rent, and provision of services, which confirms their integration into the economic processes of the region. However, since the beginning of 2000, there has been a tendency for Tatars to emigrate, associated with the search for better living and working conditions. Koreans, in turn, have also influenced Central Asia’s socioeconomic landscape, especially in agriculture. Their migration went through several stages, from voluntary resettlement at the end of the 19th century to forced deportation in 1937. Despite numerous difficulties, such as a lack of infrastructure and resources for comfortable living, Koreans could adapt and succeed substantially in agriculture. Both ethnic groups showed extraordinary resilience and adaptability, enabling them to preserve their cultural characteristics and substantially contribute to the region’s development. A comparison of their history and influence on Central Asia’s economic and cultural contexts demonstrates the versatility and complexity of migration processes.

Conclusions

The multiethnic society of Kyrgyzstan has very long historical traditions dating back to the deep Middle Ages; the first mention dates to 546 in the Chinese chronicle (Knar, 2016). Representatives of different ethnic groups and religions have coexisted in Kyrgyzstan since the 9th century. Medieval Kyrgyzstan is a living example of interethnic tolerance. An example of political tolerance is the administrative and political reform conducted by the khagan Tong Yabghu (618-630), the ruler of the Western Turkic Khaganate. He equalized the rights of nomads (mainly of Turkic origin) and sedentary farmers (Sogdians). Since 2005, this same religious tolerance has developed into a policy of multiculturalism and the preservation of the cultural identity of each nation. However, primary preference is given to the Kyrgyz as the dominant people in this multicultural mass.

However, such a policy allows everyone to preserve their characteristic features and traditional culture, leading to harmonious development. An important feature of multiculturalism in Kyrgyzstan is the policy of pluralism. Having embarked on the democratic development of society, the Kyrgyz authorities at the legislative level consolidated the policy of pluralism, especially characteristic of language legislation, reinforcing the principle of multiculturalism.

In the 21st century, bilingual education is actively developing in many countries, such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, the USA, Finland, and Switzerland, allowing students to learn two or more languages. Kyrgyzstan also commits itself to creating opportunities for the development of true multilingualism, and in the 21st century, many educational institutions are bringing this idea to life. Therefore, it can be noted that the nature of the resettlement of Tatars and Koreans to Kyrgyzstan was fundamentally different. Firstly, the Tatars migrated for a better life; they could engage in almost all economic activities here. Trade played a vital role since the territory of Kyrgyzstan was poorly developed economically.

The resettlement of Koreans to Kyrgyzstan was forced. It is not very appropriate to use the name resettlement; it was closer to a deportation than a resettlement, and during the deportation, a substantial part of Koreans died. This led to their future attitude towards the region; for survival, they had to assimilate, but during the Soviet era, many nationalities were assimilated. In the 21st century, one can see numerous attempts to revive identity, especially characteristic of the Korean diaspora. Again, they take the names of a completely Korean type, the Tatars, reviving traditional culture and rituals.

The study's main limitation was that many eyewitnesses of the events were repressed, especially those who wrote about it. The Tatars who came here during their formation were called kulaks, and the government brutally dealt with them. Therefore, minimal materials have reached modern researchers. Most importantly, Russia, as the legal successor of the USSR, did not open all archives that documented the number of repressed people. However, it was still possible to see these details due to numerous population censuses, which showed how this population and place of residence changed radically. In addition, it was evident that many people, especially the Tatars,

in these censuses, recorded themselves as Kyrgyz, and Koreans as Russians, then grew into a new ethnicity of the so-called Soviet Koreans.

In 2024, there are several directions for further scientific research. It is important to explore how specific reforms affect various ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan, particularly traditional legal systems, and how they have adapted them to modern conditions. The impact of globalization on the cultural identity of ethnic minorities should be investigated in more detail. Examining adaptation processes in the context of globalization can provide data for developing policies aimed at supporting cultural diversity and integration in a multicultural society. The study demonstrated the importance of preserving traditional cultural and legal practices and adapting to new social conditions in the multicultural society of Kyrgyzstan.

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