

Preserving health through traditions: how folk customs form a healthy lifestyle

Gulmira Turgunova^{1,1}, *Meerim Djumaeva*¹, and *Aina Aitbaeva*¹

¹ International University of Kyrgyzstan, 4, St. April 7, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Abstract This article explores the relationship between folk customs and the formation of a healthy lifestyle. It has long been observed that folkways, deeply rooted in cultural practices, influence health behavior and outcomes. One of the main objectives of the study concerns nature and ecosystem as the Earth, as part of the Universe, has a variety of natural resources that are necessary to support human life. Materials and methods of research: Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and ethnographic studies, this study elucidates the mechanisms through which folk practices shape various aspects of health, including physical, mental, and social well-being. The nomadic lifestyle shapes their unique characteristics, involving constant mobility and adaptation to diverse surroundings. Results of the study: Examining examples from diverse cultural contexts, the paper highlights the role of traditional practices in promoting healthy dietary habits, physical activity, stress management, and social support networks. Furthermore, it discusses the potential of integrating folk customs into modern health interventions to foster culturally relevant approaches to health promotion and disease prevention. Conclusion of the study: The research recognizes the importance of folk customs in shaping health behavior on the examples of Kyrgyz culture, this study advocates for the preservation and incorporation of traditional practices into modern health initiatives, thereby promoting holistic well-being in diverse communities.

Keywords: universe, nature, nomad, health, lifestyle, horse, sport, food, national games, kumyz, Kyrgyz people

1 Introduction

At all times, cultures and traditions have played a key role in shaping the way of life of peoples. They represent ancestral heritage and important values, and can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of a community. Imagine how thousand-year-old customs and rituals can become a powerful source of wisdom and great support for health.

The scientific view of this issue suggests that evolution and natural selection led to the formation of the person as we know them today. Over millions of years, humans have evolved in symbiosis with their environment, and their physiology has adapted to different environmental conditions.

Initially, humanity learned to lead a healthy lifestyle as a result of natural selection and experience. During evolution, humans began to adapt to their environment, including diet, physical activity, and other aspects of life. Through human progress and cultural development, certain practices and habits have been developed that promote health and well-being.

¹ Corresponding author: turgunova7@mail.ru

Looking into the past, you can see that within the creation of humanity, the Universe provided all the conditions for maintaining health and a long, happy life for human beings. Every aspect of the Universe is carefully designed, taking into account human needs to adapt to different environments and develop a healthy lifestyle. The diversity of cultures, lifestyles, and worldviews of humanity reflects the uniqueness of the world. Our planet Earth, revolving around the Sun, plays a key role in this system and provides the necessary order to the cycles of life.

The universe is intelligent and orderly; it controls everything, moves the entire world, and maintains a certain order in it. For example, the planets, their rotation around the axis of their orbits, the change of day and night, the seasonal changes in due time, all living creatures on Earth such as humans, the living, and inanimate world, need each other and live in harmony, maintaining balance in the Universe.

So far, no one can explain the intelligence of the Universe; scientists have proposed different versions, but those discoveries have been contradicted one by one. What does this mean? This, of course, indicates that there is a Creator of the Universe, beyond human understanding.

According to many philosophical and religious researchers, the Universe was created for a certain purpose, and a human being is the main part of this creation which has its place and purpose.

What is a person? Where and how was a person created? How can a person become a true person? These questions force humanity to constantly think. Such philosophical thoughts have existed since time immemorial and have not lost their relevance today. It is impossible to imagine that the Universe can exist without a human being or conversely, a human being can exist without the Universe and the environment that surrounds them. These two concepts are closely related.

The Universe plays a major role in human life; it is too big, vast, high, deep, and beyond people's interpretation. Of course, we can describe the concept of the Universe, but we cannot distinguish it as good or bad by comparing it to the concept of "human being", and we cannot define its size, weight, depth, and breadth. The Universe is endless, and we cannot control it; rather, the Universe controls us, and we are totally dependent on it.

It was confirmed by the coronavirus global pandemic that the world cannot be totally controlled. The coronavirus pandemic indeed served as a stark reminder of humanity's vulnerability in the face of nature's forces. Its transcended borders, economies, and social status, affecting people from all walks of life. This crisis highlighted the interconnectedness of our global community and underscored the importance of collective action in confronting such challenges.

Moreover, it prompted deep reflections on our place in the universe and our relationship with the natural world. The pandemic reminded us of our limitations and the need for humility in the face of cosmic forces beyond our control. It emphasized the importance of respecting the laws of nature and working in harmony with the world around us.

In many ways, the pandemic served as a wake-up call, urging us to reevaluate our priorities and rethink our approach to issues such as public health, environmental sustainability, and global cooperation. It emphasized the imperative of resilience, adaptability, and solidarity in navigating an uncertain and interconnected world.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, a number of adverse changes occurred in the global economy. Investors fear that further spread of the coronavirus will destroy economic growth, and governments may not be enough to stop the decline [1]. The coronavirus global pandemic has therefore an impact on the entire global economy [2].

The combination of the COVID-19 pandemic with natural hazards and climate change has significantly increased the risk of large-scale disasters in the Asia-Pacific region, including Central Asia and Russia. This is the conclusion reached by the authors of a new report by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Having survived such kind of crisis, we have the opportunity to build a more sustainable and equitable future, based on a deeper view of our place in the Universe, and our responsibility for all living well-being on Earth.

In the history of mankind, there have been evolutionary changes; different eras have their own difficulties as well as achievements. Over time, the way of life of a person has also changed many times, and it has gone a long way to adapt to all the changes in the environment and society, as well as in the Universe.

2 Materials and Methods

Let's explore the lifestyle of the Kyrgyz people from the perspective of healthy living and adaptability to change. We'll examine how traditions and customs influence the health-conscious behaviors of individuals.

The Kyrgyz people are one of the ancient peoples of the world whose origins go back to the 2nd century BC. The earliest people known as "Kyrgyz" were the descendants of several Central Asian tribes, first emerging in western Mongolia around 201 BC. Russian historian, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Victor Kozodoy, in his interview "Kyrgyz Kaganate was a superpower of that time," said the following: "The Siberian Kyrgyz stood out from the general ranks of nomads; the second thing is that the Siberian Kyrgyz are a purely Siberian topic. If other peoples without a state came and conquered the south of Siberia, then the Siberian Kyrgyz are local indigenous Siberians. Third, I was struck by the length of the history of the Siberian Kyrgyz. This is the end of the 3rd century BC (201 BC) to 1703. The result is 19 centuries of history.

This indicates that the Kyrgyz have experienced various challenging living conditions, encountered numerous difficulties, and simultaneously persevered as a nation. Most importantly, they have adapted to various changing living conditions. Our country is situated in the heart of Central Asia, with a population of 7 million people. Ninety percent of the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic consists of high mountains, thus the lives of the Kyrgyz people are always intertwined with the mountains.

As we know, early human societies were more active, engaged in hunting, gathering food, and moving around much more than modern societies. Their diet was more natural and based on the resources available to them: vegetables, fruits, berries, and wild animal meat.

Being nomadic, the Kyrgyz people have unique customs and traditions that help them preserve their health and lead a healthy lifestyle. Nomadic peoples have unique characteristics shaped by their lifestyles, which involve frequent movement and adaptation to various environments. For this, the Kyrgyz people used horses, and we can precisely point out that horses are still the main animals for the Kyrgyz today. Horses are incredibly noble and pure domestic animals that hold a special place in the history and culture of mankind.

Horses have accompanied humanity for many millennia. They were an integral part of the development of civilizations, used in agriculture, warfare, transport, and sports. Throughout history, horses have acquired special cultural significance, symbolizing strength, grace, and freedom.

For the Kyrgyz, a horse is more than an animal; it is a close friend of a man. It's not for nothing that the Kyrgyz say, "At adamdyn kanaty," which means a horse is a man's wing. On its long and difficult path of development, the Kyrgyz people (historically called the Kyrgyz Kaganate) have always relied on the horse, both in the direct and indirect sense, as they have experienced many wars, which were accompanied by victories and defeats.

All in all, horses were of great importance in the past life of the Kyrgyz people. It is well known that the lives of the heroes of ancient Kyrgyz epics are closely connected with the horses they ride. For example, the hero Er Toshtuk is saved from death several times by his riding horse. The horse of the national hero Manas, named Akkula, is born from a black-maned Kula mare on Manas's birthday and served Manas throughout his life. As soon as Akkula is shot in

Chong Kazat, Manas loses his temper and previous force. Another hero from the great epic "Manas," Almambet, when he was shot, people placed his body on his horse Sarala, and after walking for several days without drinking water or grazing, the horse Sarala safely delivered Almambet's body to Talas. The next hero, Chubak, is hit by a bullet in Chong Kazat. His horse Kok Tulpar did not surrender Chubak's body to the enemy but instead safeguarded the body of its owner. The above examples about horses emphasize the symbolism in Kyrgyz culture, which is associated with power, freedom, independence, and spiritual awakening. Additionally, it provides spiritual support to a person and reliability in extreme situations [3].

Many customs and national sports of Kyrgyz people are connected with horses, as almost most of the country's rural population leads a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Almost everyone knows how to ride a horse. Various horse games, which have been passed down from generation to generation, give a great opportunity to show your skills as a rider, dexterity and reaction.

Today, you can see such games as:

At – chabysh Horse racing is a long-distance race. An exciting competition, in which races of up to 100 km are organized, and often light boys 12-15 years old become riders and sometimes they remove saddles to increase speed.



Picture 1 The game At Chabysh

Ulak Tartysh is a spectacular game in which two teams of horsemen “fight” for the carcass of a goat. Many are fascinated by the moment when, at full gallop, riders hang from their horses and grab a carcass weighing about 30 kg. Then, the team must throw this carcass into an embankment with an improvised ring.



Picture 2 The game Ulak Tartysh

Oodarysh is another type of wrestling where you need to throw your opponent off a horse, but without using your hands. Victory can only be achieved by skillfully controlling a horse that will push the rider, perhaps even with his horse.



Picture 3 The game Er Oodarysh

Kyz Kuumai is a beautiful sight that can hardly be called a game. The rider must catch up with the rider girl, and his reward will be a kiss from the beauty.



Picture 4 The game Kyz - kumai

Tyiyn Enmei is a game where the rider tries to pick up coins from the ground at full gallop.



Picture 5 The game Tyiyn Enmei

All of these unique horse games require excellent physical condition and high sportsmanship in both people and horses. Due to the rich natural resources that Kyrgyzstan has, local residents can lead a healthy lifestyle. Preserving a variety of sports, including not only equestrian but also traditional forms of physical activity, helps preserve the rich cultural heritage of the people. These types of activities contribute not only to strengthening the body, but also to spiritual development, which is an important aspect of a healthy lifestyle.

Food traditions

Alongside their national games, the Kyrgyz have special food traditions that differentiate them from others. Kyrgyz people say, 'Ash tyrgan jerde dart tyrbait,' which means there is no illness where there is good food."

Kyrgyzstan also pay great attention to eating healthy natural food. Modern Kyrgyz cuisine has absorbed the traditions of nomadic ancestors and the taste diversity of neighboring countries.

The patriarchal structure of the Kyrgyz family with a strict hierarchy was most noticeable during meals. The place opposite the entrance to the yurt (dwelling) was considered the most honorable place. It was occupied by the eldest in the family, the aksakal. He gave up his seat only if guests came. The sons sat on the right hand of the head of the family, and the eldest wife, who was called baybiche, sat on the left. Her daughters were sitting next to her, next to them there were the seats of her daughters-in-law. The youngest wife of the aksakal was sitting by the cauldron. She put the meat on the dish, handed it to the wife of her youngest son, and she, in turn, divided the food into portions.

Due to the mountainous living conditions in Kyrgyzstan, they love lamb, horse meat and beef. Poultry and fish meat are not used in traditional dishes.

At almost every feast they serve beshbarmak (national dish) - a dish of boiled meat, thin dough and broth.



Picture 6 National dish Besh barmak

They also love *kuurdak* - pieces of meat fried with onions, and *zharkop* - boiled dough diamonds and fried meat or liver with vegetables.

Chuchuk – horse sausage with subcostal fat. Usually it is served in 2-3 pieces, since it is a delicacy, but in some regions the entire dish is served to the distinguished guest.

There are other popular Kyrgyz dishes similar to sausage: *byzhy* - boiled, peeled lamb intestine stuffed with minced meat, liver, blood, rice, flour and spices; *Zhorgom* – boiled lamb intestines braided in a special way.

The festive dish is *tash-kordo*, which means “stone food”. The recipe for the dish is as follows: pieces of meat are marinated and baked in an oven on special racks. Before the advent of ovens, meat was placed in a washed sheep stomach and placed in a pit with hot stones.



Picture 7 National dish Tash kordo

Kerchoo – lamb brisket on coals, olobo (tin) – lungs in milk

Zhaa boirok is a marinated steamed lamb carcass. Dymdama (dymlyama, dimlama) – meat stewed with vegetables. In Kyrgyzstan, people like to prepare paloo - a dish of rice, meat, onions, carrots, garlic and spices.

Shishkebek is a kebab made from lamb or beef liver. This dish is centuries old. In modern Kyrgyz cuisine it is also prepared from meat.

There are lots of traditional Kyrgyz foods which helps to support people’s health and improve physical and mental activity of a people. Based on the above listed dishes of Kyrgyz cuisine, it is necessary to emphasize that mainly Kyrgyz people eat horse meat and lamb. Horse meat does not contain cholesterol and is beneficial to human health due to its natural properties.

3 Results

Traditional foods, often rooted in centuries-old culinary traditions, hold a special place in the cultural fabric of societies across the globe. These foods are deeply embedded in the customs, rituals, and histories of communities, which pass down their knowledge from one generation to the next [4].

Thus, heals can be considered as a universal dimension of human culture, reflecting socio-cultural values, traditions, and belief shared by a community of people [5]. In light of this wide – ranging concepts of heals, also healthy lifestyle could be regarded as complex cultural schemes, involving different aspects such as nutrition, physical activity, work – leisure time, and environmental protection [7].

The next nutritious drink with miraculous powers is Kumyz.

In his work "Five Turks in Asia" Adil Hikmet Bey noted: "Kumyz is a special drink belonging to nomads. After the mare's milk is milked, it is poured into leather vats and stirred with a specially made stick called bishkek. After two or three days, the milk will turn into a delicious drink like chalap. Due to the alcohol content of kumyz, it makes you dizzy in a pleasant way. Despite this, the medicinal properties go beyond that. It has excellent medicinal

properties for tuberculosis patients and patients can recover their health if they drink it continuously for several months. People are very well aware of this property of Kumyz» [9].

Kumyz is a national drink with medicinal properties. Kumyz is made with mare's milk with special procedure of preparing. It contains easily digestible proteins, fats, carbohydrates, lactic acid, mineral salts, vitamins C, B, A. They improve digestion and promote blood circulation. The fat content of mare's milk is also less than that of other animals, and it is very healthy. It also contains a lot of iodine. [Online]. Available: <https://www.super.kg/article/show/4407>

Mare's milk is a unique product that has no analogues in consumer qualities among the secretions of the mammary glands of other types of farm animals used for milking (cows, goats, camels, yaches, sheep, elk, etc.). In terms of composition and biological properties of the main components, it differs significantly from others and is close to women's breast milk [11].

The hypolipidemic and antioxidant properties of kumyz have been discovered. In metabolic syndrome, as a result of treatment with kumyz, a decrease in weight, body mass index, sugar and cholesterol levels, as well as an increase in intestinal motor function are observed. In addition, kumyz improves the intestinal microflora and increases the digestibility of fats and proteins contained in food, especially meat [12].

The information about kumyz, as a traditional beverage deeply rooted in Kyrgyzstan's culture. Kumyz has deep roots in Kyrgyzstan's culture and is perceived as an integral part of its cultural and historical heritage. Doctor of historical sciences, professor Aidarbek Kochkunov in his monograph titled "Ethnic traditions of the Kyrgyz people (sociocultural aspects and some issues of genesis)" (2013) pointed out that numerous studies dedicated to the production of kumyz from mare's milk attest that the Kyrgyz have achieved perfection in processing this type of livestock product [14, 233 p.].

Previously, hospitable people treated kumiss not only to their guests, but also to any person passing by, as it was a national tradition. Doctor of Philological Sciences, professor B. Sagynbaeva wrote following: "Kumyz is a tradition of nomads, migration, death and tois (parties) are impossible without kumyz. In the Kyrgyz tradition people used to show respect by offering kumyz to the nomad people, or to horsemen and pedestrians passing by the house [15, 201 p.].

Kumyz as a drink symbolizes the principle of freedom, respect for one's neighbor and the generosity characteristic of the mountain people, thus being an integral part of the identity of the mountain people.

The Kyrgyz had their own rules for offering kumyz to guests as a traditional dish. In order to express respect and politeness, he serves the kumyz with both hands: Kumyz is served by both hands [16].

Another beneficial aspect of this tradition is communication between people. The Kyrgyz people value speech culture in a special way, in this case there is an exchange of information and people find out everything about person and his intention.

For example: They asked him where he came from, where he was going, what people he was from, where he was from, even his name after drinking a cup of kumyz [17].

Kumis as a medicinal drink of a nomadic people, which has its own ancient history and has beneficial properties, should be appreciated and turned into a brand.

The President of the Kazakh Academy of Nutrition, Academician Toregeldy Sharmanov in his personal communication on the topic "Kumyz as a national brand" said: "In the current age of intense globalization, there is an increasingly urgent need to preserve folk traditions and crafts, which, without taking appropriate measures, can disappear without a trace in the turbulent stream of modernity. Therefore, the time has come to take our traditional products under government control and protect them as an industry that especially needs government subsidies. We need mandatory state support for peasant farms, which, despite the fact that they are free-floating, are trying to somehow continue the work of their ancestors and provide our dastarkhan with healthy traditional food products." [18].

The popularity of the kumyz drink is known not only in Central Asia, but also in Western countries. In the village of Waldbrunn in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg (Germany) the holiday of kumyz was celebrated on May 29, 2022. About 200 Kyrgyzstani from Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic took part in the event. Kyrgyz folk melodies and songs were performed by musicians living in Germany and Austria, and Kyrgyz national games were organized. Guests of the holiday were treated to national dishes and kumyz.

(https://kaktus.media/doc/460985_v_germanii_otmetili_prazdnik_kymysa_s_omyrbekom_teke_baevym_foto.html)

4 Discussion

From ancient times to the present, people have used kumiss as a medicinal drink that prolongs human life, improves health and gives strength. Currently, kumis treatment is widely used in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Bashkiria and other countries.



Picture 8 National drink Kumyz <https://www.shkolazhizni.ru/meal/articles/17159/>

In Kyrgyzstan, kumyz treatment is very actively carried out from early spring to late autumn. Kumyz treatment is carried out precisely in **jailoo** in the summer pastures of the nomadic Kyrgyz, which are located in the foothills and mountainous regions of the country. This term, like the tradition of migrating to summer pastures itself, has very ancient historical roots that go back to the history of the Turkic peoples. Today, the area of Kyrgyz summer pastures reaches 3.9 million hectares.

Kumyz treatment is the use of kumyz for medicinal purposes. The meaning of kumyz treatment comes down to dosed consumption of kumyz according to an individual schedule in combination with climatotherapy. When treating kumyz, the nutritional value of the main diet should be significantly reduced to prevent overnutrition. Mare's milk is a white liquid with a blue tint and a slightly tart taste. In its composition, it is very different from the milk of other animals, since it contains half as much protein and almost 1.5 times less lactose than cow's milk. In its composition, this milk is close to women's milk and is digested faster than women's milk. The proteins contained in this milk are well digestible. [Online]. Available: <https://sayakat.kg/kumysolechenie/>

In many countries around the world, targeted national programs are being implemented to improve the health of the population and the biochemical composition of food products for mass consumption. According to the forecasts of the world's leading experts in the field of nutrition and medicine, in the next 15–20 years the share of functional products in the food market will increase [19].



Picture 9 Kumys treatment center Baitur

National content of the concept of kumyz:

- Kumyz is a drink;
- Kumyz is food;
- Kumyz - custom, tradition;
- Kumyz is health [15, 201 p.].

Conclusion

Each nation has its own holy symbols that determine the uniqueness of their existence in the Universe. The steppe and horses are symbols of the love of freedom of our nomadic ancestors; they passed them on to their descendants like a relay of freedom and independence.

The historical value of horses is great for the nomadic tribes that inhabited the endless steppes and mountains. The horses were with them on the battlefields and shared with the owner all the hardships of military campaigns, serving people faithfully. The extraordinary beauty and grace of horses are soulfully sung in folklore

Additionally, traditions and customs can have a significant impact on mental health. Rituals associated with religious holidays or family traditions can provide a sense of belonging and strengthen social bonds. This in turn helps reduce stress and increase life satisfaction.

It is important to note that maintaining traditions and customs that support a healthy lifestyle requires effort from both society as a whole and individuals. The maintenance and transmission

of these values should begin with the family and educational institutions, as well as through active support from government and non-government organizations.

In conclusion, traditions and customs play an important role in creating a healthy lifestyle for people. By maintaining traditional diets, physical activity and mental well-being through customs and rituals, we can not only preserve our cultural heritage, but also ensure our health and longevity.

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