



Family etiquette of Kazakhs

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Abstract

Authors in the article made an attempt to analyze the family etiquette of Kazakh people, and present an opportunity to reveal regularities to research deep roots, some rules of conduct and communication, factors to facilitate preservation of unique national traits of the people, to make a full understanding of its moral-ethical views. It is not a secret, that the family etiquette contains the coded philosophical, historical, biological, psychological, social and ethnic information that unites all the people.

Keywords: family etiquette, everyday conduct of Kazakhs, Kazakh family, traditional moral values, seniority hierarchy, taboos.

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1. Family Etiquette peculiarities of Kazakhs

Theme of family etiquette had not been yet researched in the national humanitarian sciences of Kazakhstan. However this very theme can be very interesting for researchers in history, sociology, psychology, and culture. Nowadays there can be named only several authors of the pre-revolutionary period who refer to some aspects of the Kazakh people's lifestyle. But most of them are considered with hospitality features of Kazakh nationality. Moreover, the changing realities of modern life had changed the values of the traditional family etiquette. Hence there are raising topical issues of traditional values in family. Main problems are concerned with divorce rate growth, intergenerational conflicts, gap between generations continuity, birth rate number of extramarital children etc. In the contemporary world established traditions are broken, as well as rites and customs, the process of new type of citizen is being formed. For successful creativity of a culture it is necessary for a person to be able to co-exist with others, to recognize the rights of others. This is the only way for an individual to be recognized. In other words, accepting others as you is essential in appreciation of the other as "another", as different from oneself (Kanagatova, Mahoney, Masalimova, Gabitov & Kalysh, 2011).

The problem must be actualized, not ignored, and we hold a view that knowledge of family etiquette is essential in this issue. Contemporary society needs either the growth of innovative thinking, creative approach to reality, technological breakthrough, either return to the roots, breeding moral-ethnic directives.

In the article we refer to a broad range of unpublished and well-known sources. In the core are field materials collected during research expeditions, as well as some ethnographic data on traditional Kazakh family, relating to some aspects of the given theme (Argynbayev, 1973).

On the basis of the Kazakh people traditional etiquette of communication is the collection of unwritten customary law: norms of Sharia, Adat, and relics of pre-Islamic beliefs. Ethnic formation was greatly influenced by ideas on definite moral and ethical rules of behavior which were generated in the folk sphere for centuries. They were observed for centuries, and they exist in this or that way in present times, regulating everyday behavior of Kazakhs in many spheres of public and family life.

It should be noted that Kazakh etiquette has much in common with the oriental (Islamic) people's culture. Most of the representatives of senior and middle generation people prefer following traditional etiquette, observing everyday norms of behavior which refer to basic priorities and value hierarchy. Although there is generation gap in ways of thinking and evaluation criterion, in general socio-cultural and ethnic world of Kazakh people is rather stable. It is reinforced by commonality of interests, ethnic consciousness and mentality.

Distinguished features of Kazakh etiquette observed in all situations are: adherence to hospitality institute, filial piety to seniors and parents, love to children, tolerance, modesty, politeness, honesty, sincerity, honor and dignity, responsibility, friendship, etc. and public reprimands violation of those etiquette norms. For the Kazakh people 'honor' is of central importance. The people possessing «Namys», can succeed and prosper in human relations and in all other areas of life. Everything that is considered highly moral and worthy in a person is contained in «Namys». Likewise, this notion of honor also applies to norms and rules for social interaction. The truly honorable person does not offend anyone, even the most dishonorable; he treats his associates respectfully and benevolently. All of these notions are expressed by «Namys» (Kanagatova, Mahoney, Masalimova, Gabitov & Kalysh, 2011).

If we refer to intra-family relations we will find that they are regulated by above-mentioned norms and prescriptions, as well as established family traditions. Actually, they are much more stable and stronger in the families with senior people presence and places with the compact settlement of Kazakh nationality.

Recognition and respect to the head of the family (man) is of paramount significance in family and intra-family relations. It is well known that a man, senior by age. Although under some social and economic circumstances he had to share it with someone, who was chief

breadwinner. This man led traditional Kazakh family. But in that case the division of power was arranged: one was a formal leader, and the other was responsible for housework.

The notion of “leadership” in present days is provided by recognition of someone to be the head of the family, and is registered, as the owner of a house/apartment/land/cattle. Often he is responsible for the family members and relatives, and he has duties in the society and state for some matters. For example, by our statistical data obtained in some regions of Kazakhstan and calculations of the information from the rural registration books, we have found the following tendencies. For instance, out of 1766 Kazakh households we studied in 1990 in Yenbekshi-Kazakh district of Almaty oblast, the priority of man in the family is given from 64,9 to 85,6%; in Merkensky district of Jambyl oblast out of 1562 families – from 61,5 to 79,4%; in Khromtausky district of Aktubinskaya oblast out of 1370 families – from 72,4 to 81,8%. The higher results were found in Turkestan district of Southern-Kazakhstan oblast in 1998, where out of 2583 Kazakh families– from 80,8 to 85,7% were headed traditionally by men, mostly fathers and husbands*.

Often the formal leadership in the family was held by father, who is respected due to his life experience and wisdom, while the real leader of the family is married adult son. As a rule, in such families women-mothers hold the housekeeping and management of family budget (Kalysh A.B, 1996).

Respect to seniors, and heads of families accordingly, refers to the most important priorities in the Kazakh system of moral values. Therefore, not only younger son, but also other married sons prefer in future living with their parents. 38,8% of our respondents to the question: “Who of your married children would you like to live with?” pointed to the younger son’s family. 6,5%- preferred second son, and 26,6%- with senior son; 16,6%- with son, 1,3%- with daughter, and 10,2% would like to live separately.

Those people who do not take care of their elderly parents and do not keep regular duties to them, or following the European model, leave them to the state support, are criticized by the public.

The next integral component of folk etiquette is respectful attitude to seniors. It is quite visible in the areas where social life and age statuses of the senior generation people matter. For example, in presence of the head of family or other senior people, other family members keep certain etiquette taboos. For example, it is forbidden to lay, but even sit, or lean, keep the hands in pockets, show their backs to the seniors. It is not encouraged to disturb them and interrupt their speech, cross their way or go first.

Traditional respectful attitude to senior generation covers keeping the following rules in situations: meetings and greetings, farewells until the door and gates, hand washing, dressing and undressing of upper clothes, etc. The given symbols of respect are paid to all elderly people, if age difference is considerable. Similar etiquette rules that emphasize established seniority hierarchy is spread to females too.

Another significant characteristic of family etiquette observed mostly in the southern regions of Kazakhstan, and in mono ethnic rural areas with predominant Kazakh population, is traditional, irrespective age, respectful attitude to males. For example, in undivided families with two or more married couples, except for elderly women, females usually eat separately after general males, and serve males. In the separate families during guests’ reception, females also serve males at the table, and only in narrow family circle can sit with them at the table.

In some Kazakh families there is kept a tradition that a wife must go to bed after her husband, and wake up earlier. It is also observed that females cannot show their backs to men and leave the room moving back. Also women are prescribed to cover their hair with headscarves, not to show uncovered head; they must wear long dresses, and young females must cover open parts of their bodies (Argynbayev, 1973). At the same time, majority of males and females demonstrate the opposite sex – mothers, wives, elderly women all the required symbols of respect.

Over the last time it is reported that family etiquette in most cases is under simplification, especially in urban areas and multi-ethnic rural areas. For example, representatives of younger generation keep etiquette norms mostly in reference to grandfather, father and senior brother, but not to brother who is slighter older; daughter-in-law – to mother-in-law, but not to sister-in-law, etc. That peculiarity is due to the generation gap cases, or lack of advice from older generation. As a consequence, above-mentioned situations form a social distance between an actor and the public, or work under some conditions – under strong dictate of the public. In big undivided families with seniors in power, everyday behavior is strictly regulated. In separate families from parents, primarily with younger or middle age people, there was noticed more freedom in communication. More democratic became relations between senior and younger brothers, including sisters.

At the same time in the cases connected with family rites observance: child, wedding, funeral-mourning, and calendar-religious holidays, including Nauruz, oraza, and kurban-ait, is seen revival of basic elements of traditional etiquette. For example, at such festivities, men and women sit in separate rooms or at separate tables, and in all cases there are emphasized the privileges of senior generation.

It should be noted that in intra-family relations, Kazakhs from the Southern Kazakhstan and in mono ethnic families in predominantly Kazakh population are still observed traditional family-marriage taboos and avoidance practices. We should state that in everyday life it is quite complicated to notice the line between taboos and avoidances, on one side, and with the prescribed norms of behavior on the other. In reality, they are visible in the category of close related people, i.e. between spouses and some other relatives. Avoidances and taboos can be differentiated into 2 groups that eventually pursued realization of established gender norms of public conduct. For instance, one of them were directed at lessening the jealousy instinct, others to prevent future sexual contacts between people that are tabooed due to their statuses for some reasons (Shetnberg, 1933).

Therefore, the first one is based on avoidances: not to be in the same place, jointly take food, talk to each other, and pronounce personal names, etc. The second one includes different people involved in social interaction with unpredicted consequences and certain statuses: daughter-in-law - wife, and relatives of husband, son-in-law and relatives of wife.

Often, young and mid-aged spouses in presence of their parents and elderly relatives could not openly call each other as husband and wife, and pronounce their names, preferable using other words or terms. For example, in presence of guests they addressed each other with words «ot agasy» (master of the household), «balanin anasy» (mother of child), etc. The same undesirable effect was in nurturing their child (hugging, kissing) in presence of elderly relatives, and strangers. Parental feeling could be expressed only in narrow family circle or in private.

In separate young families from parents the demand for everyday care after children prevented full observance of avoidance practices by young women. But in undivided families during the first years of marriage she had to hide her maternal feelings in public. It also was influenced by the fact that the first child is considered to be child of grandparents, and they could be jealous to parental feelings of young couple. Gradually as result of such socialization, a child is considered his parents as senior brother and “zhenge”- sister-in-law.

In undivided families with three-four generations even nowadays exist the practice of avoidances between wife and senior relatives from husband’s part. They, first of all, refer to relations between daughter-in-law and father-in-law, and may last from the birth of the first child for a long time. She must observe the following rules of conduct: not to look in father-in-law face directly, not to show open parts of her body, speak loudly or laugh in his presence. Within time the avoidance taboos were weakened, and by old age only few of them were kept (Kislakov, 1969).

A wife addressing her father-in-law or mother-in-law, senior brothers of her husband could not name their real names. The same taboo referred to the names of some things with similar pronunciation. Therefore, in reference to parents’ of her husband she could use such commonly

accepted respectful addresses, as qain ata, ake, sheshe, and to senior relatives – qain apa, qain aga, tate, or other names identical to their status.

The given taboo to pronounce personal names originates to the belief that when pronouncing somebody's name you may inflict bad forces to him. The basis of taboo and avoidances between daughter-in-law and her senior and younger relatives is prevention of illegal relations (Durenkova, 1927) and natural feeling of shyness, which people have while getting married (Kislakov, 1969). Naturally, these taboos, as well as any other etiquette are regulating communication norms, weaken within time. In everyday life they worked as commonly accepted etiquette phenomena. In everyday communication they are perceived as mutual respect of people. Therefore, we have to be very discriminatory to them. For example, nowadays some people keep the traditions to husband or wife, some more people – to parents –in-law, and much more – to traditional objects of avoidance – senior relatives of husband including parents-in-law. Within time emerged various compromise forms to follow old customs, and shortening the terms of their observance.

It should be noted, that etiquette norms of Kazakhs partially preserve beliefs in the significance of unfavorable actions that are rooted in pre-Islamic subtract of oriental tradition. Such views refer mostly to counting. It is viewed that re-counting might lead to misfortune, as “qyt” (luck) would suffer. Proceeding from such notion, mother with many children or grandmother could not count how many children they had, limited her by approximate numbers or some hints. Similar actions referred cattle number, or any other equipment the household possessed.

Communication etiquette of Kazakhs contains norms on friendship and understanding between relatives and neighbors. They emerge due to commonness of spiritual, educational and professional interests, freedom of interrelation between representatives of the same age or generation, often related by family links, origins, region or tribe. Friendly relations, certainly, envision, first of all, mutual responsibility, duty to render aid in case of need, and always reveal benevolence and unselfishness. Very often, a friend upgrades to the rank of brother that is supported by the proverbs and sayings like «A friend in need is a friend indeed», «One can even sacrifice his life for the good friend». Intensity of contacts of such type is close to family bonds.

In the above-mentioned Kazakh etiquette rules we can find ethnically specific moments, as presence of common rules of conduct typical for other peoples. Being based on traditional moral values, they envision certain level of etiquette behavior in many spheres of life: at home, visits to somebody's house and in public places. In spite the fact of innovative factors, commonly accepted etiquette norms confront them. Kazakhs, especially rural ones, unlike Europeans, maintain their traditions, uphold them in everyday life, thus strengthening either generational links either a unity with the people. But as any other living system, traditional etiquette norms are developing, organically incorporating modern elements. They are identical in many areas of the republic. Our field research materials show that it's identical either in form, either in content.

2. Conclusion

Kazakh family etiquette is an integral part of ethnic culture. “Adep” is identical with etiquette. It is a collection of rules of conduct based on traditional beliefs, rites, customs, that are carefully transmitted from generation to generation. Here we can trace the rules characteristic either for Kazakh people, either for Turkic world in general, and for Islamic culture. It is predetermined by ethnic history of peoples, mutual influence, interactions, similar traditional lifestyle and economics. Family etiquette is characterized by numerous socially approved norms, models of behavior that strictly regulate relations between adults and children, parents, relatives, spouses. Kazakhs have vertical division in relations – by age, family status, as well as in society, that is more important than horizontal, by gender. It is shown respectful attitude to senior people, and institute of aqsaqals play great role in social life. Special respect is paid in Kazakh family to grandparents due to their factual and positional seniority, and it works as a universal

mechanism, defining the status of any other member of the family and defines the system of relations. Kazakhs are very serious to building a family and keeping peace and accordance to it. Harmony in family relations played big role, and that was achieved through traditional mutual responsibility before each other, and the members of the tribal group.

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