

## Ethnocultural Features of Kazakh Nauryz Holiday

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**ABSTRACT** The paper focuses on the traditions of nauryz celebration, as nauryz appeared, what it represents and what kind of role it plays in the life of Kazakhs. Nauryz represents the vernal equinox and nature's awakening. People celebrate this day with ceremonies, which are filled with goodness, mercy and pure intentions. All nauryz customs are based on the close connection with nature. The authors have disclosed nauryz symbolic meaning, the meaning and the content of its rituals. Nauryz is a reflection of the relationship between man and the universe. This festival shows the cosmogonic representations of human, the model relationships between macro and microuniverses, and how people are adapted to natural phenomena. The paper explores the astronomical origin of the holiday, on the basis of sources.

### INTRODUCTION

At present, humanity has differing opinions about Nauryz. Eastern thinkers like Mahmud Kashgar, Abu Rayhan Biruni, Firdausi Abunasyr, Alisher Navoi, Omar Khayyam and the Kazakh scientists, Abai Kunanbayev, Alikhan Bukeikhanov, Ahmet Baitursynov, Mirzhakyp Dulatov, Shakarim Kudaiberdiev, Mashkhur Zhusup Kopeyev investigated Nauryz. Famous poets like Magzhan Zhumabayev, Saken Seifullin, Mukagali Makatayev have dedicated their works to this holiday.

Mashkhur Zhusup Kopeyev wrote about the forthcoming Nauryz as follows. "During the celebration of Nauryz, notable personalities catch fish and put it in a bowl of water. This bowl is placed in front of a crowd. People sit keenly, watching the fish. After sometime, the fish is killed and turned over and her belly glistens. Then, honorable people begin to beat the drum and shout: "The old year is gone, the new year has come!" (Kopeyuly 2008).

It is difficult to ascertain when the tradition of Nauryz celebration began in the Kazakh steppe. This can be determined by a comprehensive study of archaeological sites in the territory of Kazakhstan. Margulan believed that the mounds 'mustache' tasmolinskoy archaeological culture of Central Kazakhstan are cult-religious complexes, because human burials are not common there (Umitkaliev 2016).

Nauryz is the desire of man to know the world and to learn the secrets of nature. The literature contains many legends that are associated with

the beginning of a new life, with Nauryz. For example, al-Biruni explained as follows, "...Nauryz began indicating the beginning and the foundation of the world. On this day, Allah was believed to rotate the sphere. He created the sun and man knew the time (year, month and day), because people learned to count" (Abdullo 2007). Thus, Nauruz is linked to the sun, because the sun is the symbol of life (renewal, rebirth, existence).

The work of Omar Khayyam "Nauryz Name" considering the origin of the holiday and its role in the lives of the people. Omar Khayyam knew the language, "Pahlavi" (Middle Persian) and could interpret the primary sources. He explained the emergence of the tradition of celebrating Nauruz follows, "...As is known, the Sun has two turns, one of them is such that in every three hundred and sixty five days and a quarter of the day, it is returned in the first minutes of the constellation of Aries, at the time of the day, when it came out, and every year, this period is reduced" (Abdullo 2007: 151).

### Objective

The aim of the paper is to explore the Nauryz (New Year) holiday and to prove that Nauryz entails the relationship and harmony between man and nature.

Paper tasks:

- The authors want to learn how Nauryz develops human qualities, such as compassion, kindness and compassion.
- The authors want to understand the association of Nauryz with the revival of nature.

- Authors need to analyze astronomical sources of the festival, which connects it with the heavenly bodies.

### METHODOLOGY

As the aim of this paper was to identify the underlying dimensions of the spring festival motivation, quantitative research design was adopted and the data was collected by means of a comparison as a major technique. Also, the authors used a systematic, objective and comparative-historical methods. The authors were guided by new scientific trends, findings and conclusions in this topic. They also used the methods of collection, analysis and synthesis. The statements in the first section were adapted and modified from the past festival studies (Kazakhs 1995; Abdullo 2007; Savinovic et al. 2012; Dulatov 2016). Statements in the second section were concerned with the satisfaction as the dependent variable.

### OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Kazakhs call Nauryz “Ulystyn uly kuni” (the great national holiday). Nauryz marks the beginning of the new year. The people believe that Nauryz is the day of the vernal equinox and the awakening of nature. Beliefs and rituals done by people in the day of Nauryz is full of goodness and mercy, pure intentions and good deeds. They are also based on a close relationship with nature. Currently, an individual has different opinions about Nauryz. Based on the sources, the authors explore the meaning and value of Nauryz holiday for the common people. According to archaeological and ethnographic materials, Nauryz is not just a religious holiday, it has deep roots.

Nauryz is a reflection of the relationship between man and the universe. Nauryz shows cosmogonic representations of human, model of the relationship between the macro and microuniverses, understanding of natural processes and human adaptation to the natural phenomena. Spring festival is associated with the movement of the heavenly bodies, as an astronomical change of seasons starts on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

According to the Persian legend, man surfaced on earth eight thousand years ago, on the first day of the month of Farvardin. The month of Farvardin came from the “Pahlavi” language.

This month coincides with the beginning of flowering plants. At this time, day and night are of equal duration. According to this legend, the first day of the Persian month Farvardin is called the first day of the New Year or Nauryz ( “now” is new, “ruz” is the day). Hence, the word Kazakh Nauryz came into existence. The Persians are called the autumnal equinox “meuren”. The authors believe that the Kazakh word “meyram” (the holiday) was formed from this word. Nauryz and Meyram were major festivals of the ancient Persians. Rulers hold the celebrations in honor of the New Year. People say that he who meets Nauryz happily, the next year will be without sorrow and worries.

The legends of the Nauryz fight between good and evil, light and darkness. The sun is the source of light and it fights with its eternal enemy, darkness. Legends are associated with the names of origin of Nauryz with Jamshid and Kayumars rulers (the Arabs call it Manushalh). Jamshid made a feast on the said day, and gave him the name, Nauryz and ordered the people to celebrate the emergence of a new Farvardin each year and consider this day the new year, until a big sun turns. The truth of the Nauruz is in this. At the beginning of his reign, Jamshid was a just and merciful ruler, the people loved and respected him. Over time, the bad qualities began to surface, he began to do evil deeds, to hurt people, then he lost the grace of God (Abdullo 2007: 50). Al-Biruni in his work “Monuments of the Past Generations,” wrote that Jamshid was very fond of traveling. Thus, in one of Jamshid travels to Azerbaijan, he is seated on a golden throne and the people picked it up. At this moment, a ray of sunlight shone on his head. The people took it as a good sign, and that day became a holiday (Abdullo 2007: 153). This example proves the existence of sun worship, the perception of it as a giver of life. For example, gold is the elixir of solar and lunar is the silver elixir. According to legend, Jamshid was the first person who started to mine and smelt gold and silver. He made a golden sun-shaped disk. This fact proves that the sun is the king of the sky (Abdullo 2007: 59-90). Rich people have tried to use utensils of gold. They considered that the use of food from dishes made of gold affects human health positively and helps build courage.

There is a point of view that the tradition of the celebration of Nauryz, the peoples of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Iran, has its roots in antiq-

uity and is related to the economic life. In the year 1909, Russian Orientalist Foreigners published his work “The Sassanid Etudes”. He tried to reveal the meaning and content of the tradition of Nauryz celebration, using the information of the ancient Arab authors, Kisrawi and Masudi. The researcher also analyzed the works of Nauryz by early medieval Muslim authors, particularly, al-Biruni and Omar Khayyam.

For the Kazakh people the winter months were a very difficult time. Since Kazakhs are descendants of the Saks and Turks, they are the successors of the steppe tradition, when the nomads met and worshipped the sun first in the new year. Also, the Kazakhs have retained archaic traditions of the first bowl of initiation “*kumys*” (horse milk) to the sun during the holiday “*kumys muryndyk*” (first milking mares holiday).

Herodotus and Strabo wrote about the worship of the sun among Massagets, and sacrifice horses in his honor. Kazakhs have preserved the tradition of nomads (the sun worship). For example, the Kazakhs believe that on March 22<sup>nd</sup> (the first two hours after sunrise), sunshine brings happiness and abundance. Kazakh proverb says, “When people first meet the sun, it will light on his head and the new year send him a grace”. Thus, the nomads established the tradition to greet the sun on the first day of the year, that is, Nauryz. People bow to the sun and its rays falls on district part of the house and bring happiness and grace (Umitkaliev 2016: 21-23).

Nauryz shows the human relationship with nature, as a person dependent on it. The winter in the steppes of Kazakhstan is a six months period, the end of winter symbolizes the beginning of the new life among nomads. People’s health dwindled during the long winter months, many people could not survive the harsh times. The arrival of spring is associated with an abundance of Kazakhs, because pets produce offspring, cattle are fattened on fresh green grass, and people can eat dairy products. On the day of celebration of Nauryz, people are willing to stay on “*sogym*” (harvested in winter meat), smoked meat and festive dish, “*Nauryz kozhe*” (remnants of food, grain, millet). Thus, all the people take part in the celebration of Nauryz, and everyone is playing their part regardless of his social status.

People do not know when the celebration of Nauryz tradition was born. Sources from the nineteenth century noted that Nauryz holiday has retained archaic pre-Islamic symbols. Nomads

strictly followed the temporary calendar. Therefore, the arrival of Nauryz was associated with the law of motion of the sun. Nauryz celebration began with the equinox and lasted several days. For example, Braginsky wrote that Nauryz was celebrated twice a year, once in the middle of summer at harvest time, and the second, on the day of the equinox. The researcher believes that this tradition involves the worship of nature, its renewal and rebirth (Kazbekov 1991: 151).

Krasovsky in 1868 in his book “The Area of the Siberian Kirghiz”, wrote that all Kazakhs wait and enjoy the beginning of spring, and Nauryz has deep historical roots. The author noted that Kazakhs celebrate Nauryz, not only on 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, but in April and May (Krasovskiy 2007: 96). Nauryz appeared in the steppes of Eurasia at a time when Zoroastrianism existed here. Islam, which spread to Central Asia and Kazakhstan (at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC), could not displace nauryz and reverence for nature (Kazakhs 1995: 23). Thus, the Kazakhs are the guardians of the traditions of the ancient nomads.

Kazakhs consider nauryz as a special time, they believe that the beginning of the year is the holy time. New year coincides with the arrival of spring, when nature wakes up and a new life begins. People exchange gifts, give each other a treat, participate in aitys (singing contest with the Kazakh national instrument, *dombra*) during Nauryz. Also, the older members of the family and genus, bless their descendants.

Abu Rayhan Biruni and Omar Khayyam wrote that Eastern people celebrated Nauryz for a few days. They singled out the rules that people observe during Nauryz:

1. The fire must be lit at each outbreak, and the owner constantly pours oil into it.
2. People are wondering which one grew, among seven grains.
3. Women prepared “*kozhe*” (ritual meal), which consists of 7 components.
4. People threw out the old stuff.
5. People break the worn out utensils.
6. People give each other flowers.
7. Artists applied round ornament on the walls of houses (symbol of the sun).
8. Children hang flowers in their homes.
9. Men hold various competitions (archery).
10. People tell each other good wishes.

In 1926, the Soviet authorities banned Nauryz celebration. In this regard, ethnographers could not conduct field research and interrogate

elderly people on Nauryz holiday. Therefore, the Kazakhs lost a lot of ethnographic data and Nauryz was no longer observed as a national holiday.

Nauryz was of great importance before the establishment of the Soviet power. For example, in XVIII century, Kazakhs placed more value on Nauryz feast than on a funeral or wedding. They also believed that the blessings that older people pronounce on this day come true. On the day of Nauryz, the “*kozha*” (the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) read a special book dedicated to Nauryz. This book explained the significance of the holiday and was called “Saldama”. While the “*kozha*” read a book or elders pronounced blessings, people listened and responded with, “Amen!”. People believed that their wishes are fulfilled, and the common people will live in prosperity (Kopeyuly 2008). Kazakh intellectuals wrote in the beginning of the XX century, that Nauryz holiday is for Kazakhs, similar to what the new year means to Christians. On this day, people traveled from village to village, went from house to house, congratulated each other and treated “*kozhe*” (Subhanberdina 1998: 25).

Equinox occurs on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March in the old calendar, and on 22<sup>nd</sup> March in the new (Dulatov 2016: 334). Celebrating Nauryz and its special meaning associated with the nomadic Kazakhs lifestyle. For example, residents of western Kazakhstan still celebrate the custom of “*kérisu*” (see) on March 14<sup>th</sup>. This example shows that the Kazakhs have retained their archaic traditions. The winter lasted for six months in Kazakhstan, and people cannot communicate with each other, because the deep snow lies on the roads. When the snow melts in the spring, and the road is clear, the Kazakhs pay visits to each other’s homes, congratulating each other on the end of the winter, enjoy the spring (beginning of a new life).

In ancient times, Nauryz began with migrations kystau (winter parking) at the cocktail (spring parking). The most beautiful girl in the village led the migrations. When the village was getting to the point of migrations, people began the fun and continued until the morning. Festival begins on March 21<sup>st</sup> and lasted for three days. Nauryz meant a lot. Firstly, it represents the equality of day and night, man and nature, as well as social groups in society. March 21<sup>st</sup> marks an astronomical beginning of spring. This is the beginning of a new year, a time when the day is longer, and the night becomes shorter. “Noauuz

begins with “*aitys*” between a guy and a girl, which symbolizes the struggle between spring and winter. This holiday ends with folk games...” (Kazakhs 1995: 198). Tired of winter, waiting for spring and lengthening of daylight, reflected in the popular mind that winter is evil (darkness) and the spring is good (light).

Kazakhs perform ritual purification before the Nauryz holiday. For example, the Kazakh proverb says, “It is pure as white snow that fell on Nauryz”. Kazakhs believe that happiness and abundance will be present in a clean place. Older people say, “If a new year comes into the house, where the pure live, all diseases and hardships go from there”. In “*Hyzyr*” (holy night before the New Year), people fill the bowl with milk, “*ayran*” (kefir), “*kumys*” (horse milk), “*shubat*” (camel milk), and they request for prosperity and rich harvest. Older people believe that water is a symbol of life, and milk is a symbol of abundance. Young people and women perform sacrifices with milk and butter prior to Nauryz, to awaken nature, and for improving the condition of their relatives. Teenagers and young men clean springs, wells, canals and other water sources. Kazakh proverb says, “If you see a spring, cleanse its source”.

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the whole community met to welcome dawn. Women sacrificed to the sun and water, poured oil into the sources and sprayed milk on the grass. When the first ray of sun enters the house in the new year, the owners lit a candle at the place of honor in a yurt. When the sun sets over the horizon, the two “*akyns*” (bards) go to the center and start “*aitys*” (bard competition in the Kazakh national instrument *dombra*) “dead and alive”, it is a symbol of the constant struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, summer and winter. When darkness comes, the people stir up two big fires. The youths are divided into two groups, and they pass in between the fires torches. The torch consists of a wooden stick with an oil cloth at the end, that the youth ignites. They sing in chorus, “*Alas, alas, Peled kalas!*” (cleanse, dirt out). The fires purify the surrounding countryside, and then they jump over the fire. This cleansing ritual is based on a belief in the sacred fire properties (“*Alastau*”). All through the night, the young men rode on a swing (“*altybakan*”), played various traditional games and arranged “*aitys*”. In the morning, everyone went up the hill and met the dawn.

There are some traditions that are associated with Nauryz:

- The first day of New Year is the day of Nauryz.
- The first month of each new year is a month Nauryz (March).
- New Year's holiday is a Nauryz holiday.
- Adults pronounce the blessing, express their wishes for Nauryz. They entertain guests with smoked meat that is prepared specifically for Nauryz.
- Women cook a special dish, "Nauryz kozhe".
- All participants in the holiday wish each other prosperity, and say kind parting words.
- Progeny, who was born in Nauryz, the owners did not sell, because it is valuable.
- People sing special songs.
- People guessing riddles of the spring changes the nature.
- The bird that flies in the spring is called "nauryzkok".
- The grass, which grows in the foothills and has medicinal properties is called "nauryzsheshkek".
- The snow that fell during the holiday is called "nauryzsha".

Kazakhs prepared special ritual meals of "belkoterer", "uikashar" and "nauryz kozhe". These ritual meals are different, in that, they are designed for different age groups of gender, in order to improve people's health.

"Belkoterer" has to improve the health of the elderly and infirm (Kenzheahmetuly 2016: 41). It consists of a high-calorie, soft and delicious food of butter, "kazy" (horse ribs), "zhent" (a mixture of fried wheat flour with the addition of butter, honey and cottage cheese, cooked in a special way), mare's milk, curd and honey. Older people pronounce blessing on the children, neighbors and friends, who treated them well. People believe that a blessing in Nauryz has great power. This exchange strengthened the relationship between the older and the younger generation, which have an educational character.

Women prepared "Uikashar" for young men, the night before Nauryz. Women cook smoked horsemeat in fresh cow's milk. Milk in the month of March has a high-calorie content and it is nutritious. Women serve young men at a gala dinner in honor of Nauryz. In turn, the men gave gifts to women after eating this dish. The gift is called "selty etkizer" (bracelets, rings, combs, mirrors). The authors believe that this feast sym-

bolized the renewal of nature and the stimulation of procreation. Respondents between 60-80 years are unaware of the existence of this custom (they were born in the Soviet period, when the Soviet government banned Nauryz). Respondents older than 80 years of age will remember this practice, but are unaware of its destination. The authors believe that this fact is a consequence of the policy, which the Soviet government carried out with respect to national traditions and customs of the peoples of the USSR. Because the main purpose of Soviet power was to create a Soviet man without national distinctions.

Finally, the main dish called is "Nauryz kozhe". Most Kazakh women can cook this meal. Traditionally, the dish consists of the seven components of water, milk or fermented milk products, cereals and smoked horsemeat. Currently, the composition of the food varies, but the sum of its ingredients remain the same. People offer "Nauryz kozhe" to all who come to their house, regardless of their social or financial position. As a sign of gratitude for the food, the guests utter good wishes and blessings (Kenzheahmetuly 2016: 45-46).

The main purpose of "Nauryz kozhe" is the unity of the people on the feast of renewal and hope. "Nauryz kozhe" is an essential element on the new year's table. Celebrating Nauryz unites the world of the nomads with the sedentary world, reflecting the relationship of man and the universe. Victims from human are a propitiatory and thanksgiving gift to nature. Sacrifice is accompanied by appeals to the natural elements. Today, they are also accompanied by prayers in Arabic. The composition of the gifts traditionally consisted of meat and dairy products like butter, milk and traditional sweets. Presently, during the Nauryz celebration, people also take part in National Games. For instance, game in "asyk" is very popular among all ages of Kazakhs (Sydykov et al. 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Nauryz is a national holiday of the Kazakh people. The value of the holiday is as follows:

1. It brings harmony between man and nature.
2. It encourages the younger generation to love and respect nature.
3. It is a symbol of kindness and charity. All through the period of the holiday, each person had to help their loved ones or those in need.

4. This holiday helps purify the soul and body.

In the twentieth century, Kazakhs celebrated Nauryz till the 1920s. Therefore, people who were born after 1928, do not remember this holiday. In 1988, Alma-Ata celebrated Nauryz, then from the year 1989, all regional centers of Kazakhstan celebrated this holiday.

Thus, Nauryz acquired the status as the state holiday in the Republic of Kazakhstan and it is celebrated everywhere. Russian Kazakhs also celebrate it. Currently, the New Year ritual complex retained dish Nauryz, Nauryz skin and fill dishes with water or milk. The old pronounce blessing, older women seek protection and patronage from the Sun and Water. People visit each other's homes, and give gifts. As an innovation, the authors brought the idea of distributing bread (7 copies) among neighbors and relatives.

In the XVIII century, people celebrated Nauryz publicly and massively. Later on, as a result of the colonial policy of the tsarist government, and then the Soviet Government, the tradition of mass folk festival on Nauryz was lost. After the collapse of the USSR, this holiday restored the nation's status. Nauryz is a holiday meant for uniting the people, raising a charity, and calling for compassion.

Nauryz reflects the relationship between man and the universe. In the celebration of Nauryz, people can see the picture of a person's cosmological concepts, model the relationship between the macro and micro universes, as well as under-

standing of natural processes and human adaptation to its natural phenomena.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Futuristically speaking, scientists need to explore the Persian sources, so they can find the date when people began to celebrate the holiday, Nauryz. They should also focus their attention on the study of customs and rituals that are associated with the holiday Nauryz. In addition, researchers need to consider the role of Nauryz holiday for the consolidation of all the peoples of Kazakhstan.

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