

# THE WEDDING CEREMONY IN KAZAKH FOLKLORE: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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**Abstract:** The study aims to analyze the most significant area of family and household ritual folklore, which is regarded as a complex system of folklore studies, and to showcase the extent of research on these topics in national folklore. The relevance of the study consists in describing the ancient traditions and rituals of the Kazakh people, which have great importance for traditional Kazakh society, their spiritual development, the formation of personality in the community, and behavioral education. Wedding ceremonies were considered in conjunction with the history of various understandings, and an analysis of current problems of development and transformation, from ancient centuries to the present time, will be carried out. Experimental method was used during the study. As the results of the study of ritual customs held during weddings, the form of performance of rituals and related folklore samples and the level of their application and sensation were determined. It can be emphasized that Kazakhstan in the 21st century is faced with living conditions at the intersection of different cultures.

**Keywords:** tradition, phratry, ceremony, farewell song of the bride, ritual customs, family

## INTRODUCTION

The Kazakh wedding ceremony is one of the most important branches of the complex system of family folklore. It contains not only the historical knowledge of an entire people, but also the essence of poetry and music, the meaning of family values, and the rich heritage of national psychology (Iskakova et al. 2022). Therefore, studying it scientifically presents a complex problem that requires differentiation. Since the last century, the wedding ceremony has begun to be studied as a socio-legal, socio-economic, and religious-magical act (Ibraev et al. 2017). Later, attention was drawn to the nature of the folk drama, reflecting the ratio of two families (Obayeva et al. 2020). The ancient goal of reuniting a man and a woman, which led to the emergence of endogamous and exogamic marriages from group marriages, has determined centuries-old traditions of human reflection on culture, responsibility for the continuation of generations, and the choice of a bride (Otar 2014). Gradually, over centuries, the complex system of the wedding ceremony was formed (Abilkhairova et al. 2014). Its structure, including its composition, specific customs, relative genre diversity in folklore, and figurative and artistic elements, developed over time (Stadnik 2024). Particular attention was paid to the roles and significance of each of the primitive wedding rites. Each rite was imbued with a singular semantic meaning, which was understood only within the cultural and emotional context of the ritual itself. The triumph and complex structure of the wedding ceremony of the Kazakh people from the 18th century has attracted the interest of researchers. Interesting information is presented in the diaries and collections of scientists-travelers visiting the first Kazakh steppe (Khazretali et al. 2018).

In an article entitled “On the forms of Kazakh folk poetry”, the famous Kazakh folklorist Shokan Ualikhanov (1985) indicates the importance of the ceremony of bringing the bride, while Ibrai Altynsarin (2003) in his work “Essay on the theme of the Orenburg department of matchmaking traditions of Kazakhs, wedding and seeing off a girl”, asserts that *Kyz uzatu*<sup>1</sup> and the bride’s drive are rituals performed within more than one day, consisting of several stages; each stage is clearly formulated by rituals. The importance of the traditions of the Kazakh people up to seven ancestors was emphasized.

In his work “Words of Tradition”, Akhmet Baitursynov (2003) gave a definition of such traditions as *heat-heat*<sup>2</sup>, *betashar*<sup>3</sup>, *toybastar*<sup>4</sup>, *marriage*<sup>5</sup>, and *bata*<sup>6</sup>. In the article entitled “Traditions and customs, poetry for *Kyz uzatu*”, Mukhtar Auezov (2001) analyzed the customs of *heat-heat*, acquaintance-farewell, poetry, and *betashar*. And in the writings of Alkey Margulan (1985), the procedures for the ransom of the bride, the filing of the bride with cattle in the wedding ceremony, the preservation of a skillful rite, the will of the father, the theft of

the bride (secretly), the purification of the bride by fire, and *betashar* are discussed, and Malik Gabdullin (1958) considers the genre character in “Essays on customs”. For the first time in monographs of family folklore, in the section “Rituals of Traditions”, Bekmurat Uakhatov (1974) was the first to investigate family folklore at the level of a monograph and highlight the section “Songs Composed by Traditions” of his work “Kazakh Folk Songs” for general family traditional folklore and revealed all the features of this topic.

The main novelty of Kenzhekhan Matyzhanov’s (2007) work was the consideration of family folklore in combination with traditions, customs, and concepts, which were performed according to the periods of a person’s life before death. As a result, the general principles of rituals and customs included in the complex system of family rituals were determined; their characteristics were analyzed. However, a comprehensive understanding of the wedding ceremony itself has revealed several urgent problems that require restudy in accordance with the demands of contemporary folkloristic science. For example, it is necessary to consider the ethnographic, dramatic, and poetic aspects of the wedding ceremony. This includes analyzing the regional variations in the role of folklore in both traditional and modern wedding practices, as well as associated rituals. Additionally, a comparative approach should be taken to evaluate similarities and differences with the wedding traditions of other Turkic peoples and cultures worldwide. This is particularly important because understanding a wedding ceremony today presents a complex challenge – not only in the context of a single village or family but also in uncovering the broader, distinctive features of the ceremony within its cultural and historical framework. In this context, several studies in musicological science have been conducted (Yagi 2020). Furthermore, a significant concern is the identification of intricate interaction processes in the wedding ceremonies of various ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. This study aims to analyze the nature of contemporary tradition in various regions of Kazakhstan, highlighting the differences in the modern meaning and function of traditional concepts in modern weddings.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To understand the origins and development of the Kazakh wedding ceremony one must consider both Kazakh culture and human cognition. In general, Kazakh common customs are influenced by both general circumstances and regional peculiarities. The customs vary depending on the territorial specifics of their location and the historical conditions that have existed since the region’s inception. At the same time, the peculiarities of the customs and traditions

of the diasporas inhabiting this region allowed the local residents not only to communicate with the traditional roots of those returning to the country, but also to integrate the specific characteristics of the environment they had lived in. The most urgent problem in modern folklore is identifying the problems faced by the Kazakh wedding tradition, while maintaining its semantic depth, spiritual and educational essence, as well as its advantages and disadvantages.

To analyze the nature of modern wedding ceremonies, research was conducted between 2018 and 2020 in the Almaty, Turkestan, and Atyrau regions. The study involved 75 informants, aged 16 to 70 years, representing different generations and perspectives on wedding traditions. The research combined direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and audio-visual documentation to assess the interplay between traditional customs and modern innovations in Kazakh wedding ceremonies. Informants were engaged in various ways:

- 1) *Participant observation*. Researchers attended wedding ceremonies, observing rituals such as *kыз узату*, *zhar-zhar*<sup>7</sup>, *synsu*<sup>8</sup>, and *betashar*. Special attention was given to the continuity and modification of traditions across different regions.
- 2) *Interviews with informants*. Conversations were conducted with wedding participants, guests, and family members. Some interviews took place during the wedding, while others were conducted separately to gather deeper insights into traditional customs, their meaning, and their evolution.
- 3) *Comparison of rituals across regions*. The study explored regional variations in wedding customs, focusing on whether traditional elements were preserved as a whole or performed as isolated rituals.
- 4) *Analysis of audio-visual materials*. Video recordings and audio documentation of wedding songs and performances were reviewed to examine how the meaning and performance of traditional songs varied across different weddings.
- 5) *Influence of social development on traditions*. The research also considered scholarly perspectives on how social and cultural changes have influenced modern wedding practices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of the interaction of various wedding ceremonies, the task of typological similarity arises – to create a new family and sustain offspring. The groom takes this initiative, which the bride's final words reinforce, and continues from there. The action of the wedding plot develops and ends in one direction: wooing a bride and transferring her into a new status, thereby

securing new responsibilities in her husband's household. The events leading up to the beginning of the wedding ceremony system have largely retained their traditional character. In other words, the people hold a deep-rooted belief that the preparation for the wedding holds greater significance than the actual wedding ceremony itself. The people paid great attention to each of the wedding ceremonies. This is due to the belief that creating a family, integrating into society, raising a *shanyrak*<sup>9</sup>, and building a yurt are the most important tasks in a person's life. First and foremost, the parents' dream is for their son to marry and start his own family, and for their daughter to marry successfully. Secondly, they want their daughter to demonstrate initiative in life and take responsibility for all her actions. Lastly, they want her to continue her family's legacy and contribute to the development of her tribe, people, and all societies (Matyzhanov 2007). During the wedding ceremony, they form their own complex system of actions and words, music, superstitions, and clothes.

Wedding folklore is characterized by the performance of well-known motifs, i.e., different songs. Most Turkic peoples perform the poem "Heat-heat" as part of the traditional rite of *Kyz Uzatu*. The main point is to comfort the girl and direct her to a new life. At first, the singers are divided into two groups and sing songs, but at the end, all the guests unite to wish the newlyweds happiness and prosperity in a new life. Alexander Veselovsky (1940) noted that in the most ancient era, when fever-heat is born, a characteristic feature of the pair's struggle in dialogue with both sides is the girl's defeat and recognition in life, and the predominance of the groom's side.

The content of "Heat-heat" has also changed. It now tends to be sung in groups and has completely changed the initial form. This poem sounds today at weddings (Kelmendi 2024). However, it no longer contains any of the previous content. Previously, the content of the song was tragic, but in modern conditions, it glorifies the celebration of the wedding and young happiness. In addition, the pronunciation of the poem has changed. The groom's side performs "Heat-heat" as a choir song for guests (Qasqabasov 2007). Even now, "Heat-heat" is not sung in a living voice as before but recorded in advance, so the meaning and importance of the custom are lost. The rites of "Heat-heat" and *synsu* characterize not only sadness and social inequality but also embody a deeper meaning. Their true and deep meaning lies in remembering the equality of life and death and appreciating the present – that is, life.

According to the traditional custom, the girl sang *synsu* and made a ceremonial farewell. For this, they prepare the girl in advance and send her according to all traditions. "A happy girl who joined her new family hid her joy, sang heat and heat and *synsu*, since the position of society is such. First, say goodbye to a happy childhood and youth. Secondly, a world that is entirely

unfamiliar, unpredictable, and full of strangers awaits. In this case, if the girl and her family do not cry, the bed is alien to all guests” (Matyzhanov 2007). But, despite the different names, Mukhtar Auezov (2001) refers to the poem “Farewell-acquaintance” in the context of Seungsu as a separate genre, while Saken Seifullin (1964) refers to it as “Synsymba”. Bekmurat Uakhatov (1974), using this term, conducted research and dwelled on the essence of familiarization. The final part, which takes place on the eve of traditional synsu, differs from modern *synsu* in that it involves a separate ritual where the bride receives a ransom, the arrival of the groom, and the period until the wedding itself. A girl getting married visits all her relatives, acquaintances, and friends, saying goodbye to them and telling all her sadness and suffering. According to Alexei Levshin (1832), “in the Junior and Middle Zhuz<sup>10</sup>, a bride bidding farewell to her family was ceremonially lifted onto a carpet, whereas in the Great Zhuz, she was required to walk on her own”. During her farewell to her family, the bride not only recited her memorized poems but also included her own poems, expressing her feelings. If the initial farewells to the whole village were characterized by a uniform mood, on the wedding day, the girl’s sadness and a profound understanding of her fate took center stage. This is because a married girl is no longer a young and carefree girl but already the mistress of a family. All her actions, clothing, and character must correspond to new traditions. On this occasion, the girl uses poetry to express her inner state and mood.

*There were many people in front of the doors  
I am leaving my house.  
Despite my resistance  
I’m getting married.*

However, the girl’s primary task is to bid farewell to her country and land. This is the girl’s farewell to the skullcap (rather than the skullcap<sup>11</sup>, *saukele*<sup>12</sup>, *kimeshek*<sup>13</sup>), a farewell to home, homeland, childhood, and youth.

*If you ask, there is a skullcap on the right side,  
I have my will at home.*

or

*On the right side of the father was a skullcap,  
I’m not free now.  
Put a saukele on me  
I am unhappy and in pain.*

The tradition of altering a girl's headdress to reflect the unique traits of each country carries a universal significance. The character of the girl's headdress varies. For instance, when the Kazakhs dispatched a girl, they removed the skullcap and replaced it with the *saukele*. "Here is *taqiya*, *borik* – a symbol of girlish carelessness" (Sultangareeva 1986).

Consequently, the girl has developed her own essence of crying skullcaps (a symbolic farewell ritual in which a bride mourns the end of her childhood and maidenhood before marriage). After all, the headdress showed the social level of a woman. Therefore, a girl who is getting married will say goodbye to her youth and unwillingly put on a *saukele* on her head. That is, *syysu* is a wedding ceremony that a girl participates in on the eve of leaving her village, where she bids farewell to her parents, relatives, childhood, country, and land. The home, the *shanyrak*, the threshold, the right side of the yurt, and the front door all hold significant meaning in the *syysu* ritual. The girl's life in her parental home is temporary. She is a guest in her house, and before leaving, the girl involuntarily says goodbye to every part of her home. "According to the Orenburg Kazakhs, the girls experienced instances when they tore out the front door due to their strong feelings for their home" (Zhakan 2014; Kartaeva et al. 2017).

*My golden threshold  
Silver is also my threshold.  
I thought I would step over and leave  
I'm a girl leaving you.*

"The meaning of the concept *Kyzkonak* in all texts of *Syysu* is twofold. It represents a girl as a transitory figure – someone extended, outgoing, and temporary. More broadly, it reflects the universal notion of a "guest in life", emphasizing the impermanence of human existence. Therefore, the bride is equated with the deceased, who has the "right side" of the house after death. The deceased remains a "present" in his house for one night. The right side of the house is the connection point of the enclosed space (house) with the world. That is, both the girl and the deceased are representatives of other peoples" (Zhakan 2014; Mukhan et al. 2020).

The girl's mother, girlfriends, friends, and peers shared their personal thoughts and expressed their feelings and wishes for happiness. "According to ancient tradition, before the bride left, the entire village gathered to bid her farewell. The elders offered their blessings, while young women and daughters-in-law accompanied her on foot beyond the village. As the husband and bride adjusted to their new roles and prepared for parting with her family, they embraced, expressed their emotions, and wept. The assembled group is visually



inspected until the procession moves forward. According to tradition, the girl and her husband are not supposed to take care of themselves after moving. On the way, familiar auls they meet congratulate them and wish them happiness” (Altynsarin 2003). At the same time, when it comes to the variety of modern ceremonies, the opinion of many scholars is reduced to a single thought. This also applies to wedding traditions. For example, the Karelian researcher Un-elma Konkka (1974) commented that the songs of the *synsu* spoke of the fear of getting married. Marriage was compared to death: “wedding lamentations expressed the bride’s feelings of parting with her family and home, with carefree life and youth, or, more precisely, lamentations made the bride deeply realize and experience this separation, separation forever”. Apart from these reasons, they are the final motives associated with her existence:

*After the rain there must be greenery,  
The grass will probably replace the tulip.  
Country-loss of its people,*

Probably the most unfortunate girl is the one whose fate is predetermined from birth, reinforcing the idea of a girl’s temporary place in life, as mentioned earlier. These ritual words express that the girl is leaving her home, leaving a foreign country, which makes her capable of a new life, adapting to a new life, and separating her father’s house from herself.

According to female active function, the *synsu* and *joktau* are very close. One girl is able say what the other said, and they have similarities in terms of pronunciation. In appropriate verses, each girl expresses her confessions of hearts, dreams, and hopes in a unique way. At the same time, as in Islam, *joktau* is a genre that represents the degree of talent, the ability to think and feel. Today, the tradition of sending off a bride varies across different regions, with each area maintaining its own unique customs and practices. For example, only in the northern and central regions do men go to Kudalyk and try to attend the evening. Previously, the girl and her husband’s relatives would leave in the morning. After all, a new day is a symbol of a new life. “Previously, the girl’s move was called *Kyz komegi*, and her mother, with her adult daughter-in-law, sees her off with her younger brothers and sisters on horseback. The girl had to leave without turning back. According to all traditions and rituals, the newlyweds were brought to a new house, crossing the threshold with their right foot. According to all customs and traditions, the bride and groom are greeted by a *shashu* (a ritual scattering of sweets or coins). Then, a respected woman, known as *el kelini*, *zhurt kelini*, or *khalyktyk kelin*, steps forward to welcome the bride. Holding her by the right hand, she leads the new bride to the black



cauldron and recites a prayer for the deceased ancestors of the family, offering wishes for happiness, patience, and prosperity. After these rituals, the young bride is allowed into the house” (Argynbayev 1983).

The bride, entering the threshold with bent knees, greets all the guests after she is laid in a soft Tula next to the hearth. Ancient magical beliefs associate this ritual with symbolic transformation, linking it to the idea of acquiring qualities such as fertility, strength, and prosperity – attributes often ascribed to animals in traditional Kazakh culture. In addition, in the traditional worldview, a sheep’s skin symbolizes growth. Its role in bridal customs has symbolized goodwill for many future generations. After that, the final *betashar* procedure coincides with the ancient concepts. Well-known ethnographer Halel Argynbaev expressed his opinion about this: “Young brides hide from their father, grandfather, and elder-younger brothers of the husband, without seeing them. Sometimes, the concealment obscures the entirety of life. According to this habit, one should consider a group that once experienced all peoples as proof of the struggle against marriage traditions” (Argynbayev 1983).

The research found that all Turkic peoples practice the *betashar* rite of the new bride. In addition, they strictly adhered to one rule during the *betashar* ceremony: revealing the bride’s face only at the conclusion of the procedure. The bride did not reveal her face with bare hands. The man who exposes the daughter-in-law’s face with reeds does so using a stick, a white or red rag, and then a *dombra*<sup>14</sup>. The scholar Kenzhekhan Matyzhanov, who studied the folklore of the family tradition, expressed his conviction about *betashar*. In other words, this ritual symbolizes the introduction of the younger “lower world” into the “middle world”. The general procedure involves the simultaneous performance of functions such as preservation of cultural heritage (ensuring the continuity of traditions, language, and ancestral knowledge), social bonding, education, and moral guidance. Today, there is a fundamental shift in this profoundly meaningful procedure. Modern trends do not align with traditional customs. Additionally, the performance style is also special. Its activities are simplified and in line with the requirements of the time. For example, in the past, the *betashar* ceremony aimed to introduce a new environment and pave the way for young women embarking on a new life. The significance and meaning of the rituals take precedence, and the cognitive content gradually transforms into an artistic and aesthetic meaning, leading to an increase in educational activity. Depending on the listener’s specifics, we can divide this into types: moral, educational activity, also aesthetic pleasure. This is evidenced by the performer. One of the procedures in the wedding ceremony is the “dead-alive” procedure. Ethnographers have formulated diverse opinions about this rite (Zhunisov 1994; Naurzbaeva et al. 2021).

The traditional custom of *Otau koteru* involved participation from the entire village. The village raised the *shanyrak*, the circular crown of the yurt, to the top of the structure during this ceremony, symbolizing the establishment of a new family. As part of the tradition, the bride brought her dowry items into the house. A respected elder ceremonially raised the *shanyrak*, and the most esteemed woman of the village was the first to enter the house, anointing the fire with oil and blessing the threshold. A respected elder prepared the table (*dastarkhan*) and scattered sweets (*shashu*) to celebrate the occasion. A unique tradition that has persisted since ancient times involves the groom's relatives inviting young people to the "home demonstration" ceremony. The goal of this tradition is to help the young bride quickly adapt to her new environment, facilitating her assimilation into the family. Her upbringing, manners, and moral character are assessed during this period to determine how well she embodies the expected values of a respectful and well-raised bride. The bride's task is to bow to all relatives and the whole house. In order to assist financially, older and experienced mothers prepare a *shashu* for a new bride, a tradition known as *Өңір салу*. On the appointed day, the bride and groom arrive at the bride's house through a procedure known as *Esik ashar*. The bride will see the groom for the first time after the wedding on this day. He brings special gifts and undergoes various tests. However, this stage allows for more relaxed interaction compared to the initial wedding rituals.

The results of the experiment indicate that the integral structure of the traditional rite has been violated. According to the meaning, the preserved image, executed, is narrowed in place, time, and meaning of execution. For example, the emotional state of the girl during the singing was diminished. This may be because others performed the key elements of the ritual on her behalf, leaving the girl herself to play only a symbolic role with minimal emotional involvement in the situation. The significance of the songs performed is evident in this context. Among the informants, there were those who paid more attention to the songs performed during games rather than the wedding process or the spirit of patriotism (Seok et al. 2021). In addition, issues related to attraction – distribution and transmission of speech (toasts) – were raised. Additionally, we noted informants who held the belief that young people's future lives depend on the fulfillment of traditional rituals and that non-observance of these conditions is detrimental.

The essence of the traditional wedding and its associated procedures are controversial: they involve bidding farewell to a girl's life in her father's house and establishing a new, yet dependent, life in the groom's house, which includes an obligatory woman, a bride, and adaptation to the mother's life. The concept of family values has evolved, along with the social and personal responsibility of

women and men, leading to a reduction in the mandatory procedures. In modern weddings, elements such as wishes and congratulations, various games, and performances play an important role. These elements introduce a new feature to the ceremony, distinguishing it from its earlier, more dramatic nature, which was defined by traditional songs, moods, games, and the symbolic meaning of change. That is, the wedding has been turned into a fun theatrical game, and all those gathered became its direct players, direct participants. Previously, specific individuals were responsible for leading and organizing the wedding proceedings. However, weddings have now become more inclusive, with a renewed emphasis on collective participation. Today's weddings feature a variety of performances, dances, and exciting games, all in accordance with a specially developed program. In modern Kazakh weddings, extravagance and emphasis on entertainment can detract from the core traditions and meaningful content of the ceremony.

The duration of the modern custom was shorter than that of the previous ones, ending as soon as possible. Many beliefs and traditions are not made, and special attention is not paid to them. This does not correspond to the generally accepted understanding of how much each family has to do with traditions. Now, the parents of both parties meet in one place, such as a restaurant, to discuss, agree, and acquaint themselves with each other. The responsibility lies with the guy; the girl's side is responsible for *kudalyk*<sup>15</sup> and *sirga salu*<sup>16</sup>. The girl's house hosts these ceremonies. Also, while *uzatu*<sup>17</sup> was traditionally performed in the house, it is now in restaurants, thereby losing the significance of the farewell *synsu* associated with the house.

The transition from Western rites is reflected in the ceremonies of the modern wedding ritual, along with the circumstances that prevailed during the Soviet government. For example, during the bride's escort, a white cloth is laid out, rose leaves are scattered, flowers are thrown, cakes are cut for the parents and husbands, games are played, humorous songs are sung, and dances are performed. As a result, weddings are filled with an atmosphere of lively excitement and friendly competition – whether in seating arrangements, contests, or traditional games related to the bride. For example, the *betashar* ceremony was traditionally performed in the daytime before lunch. In most cases, this persists. Today, some restaurants stage *betashar* at night and in natural settings. The essence of *betashar* is also lost by the recitation of meaningless verses. In most cases, priority is given to the entertaining show character of the wedding, rather than the spiritual and educational.

Basically, the formation and development of Kazakh folklore began with the early identification and distribution of samples of oral literature. This is evidenced by the mythical stories and drawings on ancient Turkic inscriptions

(Pangereyev & Baltymova 2019). However, the continuity of tradition is changing or disappearing in our time.

## CONCLUSIONS

In modern weddings, the meaning of only an interesting, joyful mood of human life prevails. The legitimacy of the understanding of the private family as the common joy of the whole people has been preserved. Many celebrations are rooted in tradition, where young people dress in national attire, greet guests, wait for candles and entertainment, and generally strive to uphold traditional values. They adhere to the modern demands of condensing, simplifying, and maintaining consistency across various religious genres. Many wedding traditions that were once obligatory and held deep symbolic meaning are now performed mainly as formalities, serving to uphold cultural etiquette rather than their original purpose. The execution of the Kazakh wedding ceremony is not uniform but consistent. Different areas within the same region perform the ceremony differently.

Kazakh folkloristic science faces great challenges. In the modern world, where different cultures intersect, the transformation of national traditions takes on new dimensions. This is particularly significant because family values remain a fundamental aspect of any society. In general, since the wedding is a significant event for a single family, it is important to consider the individual's requirements. But everyone believes that a wedding, being a home, is a precondition for the life of the younger generation, which will become the owner of the future society. Therefore, it is important to bring the wedding tradition to the forefront.

In conclusion, it can be emphasized that Kazakhstan is experiencing living conditions at the intersection of different cultures in the 21st century. We must be especially attentive to family values so that our traditional values do not lose their basic meaning and, during the period of various social transformations, retain their particularity without absorbing the precedents of globalization. Our ancestors, in their wisdom, shaped our entire culture and tradition. Based on this, our primary responsibility is to uphold the educational standards of our family and community.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Kyz uzatu* (*kyz yzatu*) is a traditional Kazakh pre-wedding ceremony that marks the formal farewell of a bride from her parental home before she is married. This ceremony is deeply rooted in Kazakh customs and signifies the symbolic transition of a daughter from her birth family to her new life in her husband's family.
- <sup>2</sup> Heat-heat (*qyttyqtau*) – This term refers to a traditional congratulatory or well-wishing practice. It is often associated with celebrations, particularly weddings and childbirth, where guests express their blessings and good wishes to the family.
- <sup>3</sup> *Betashar* – This is a significant Kazakh wedding ritual, meaning “unveiling of the bride”. Upon arriving at her husband's home, the bride, with her face covered, is introduced to her new family through verses sung by an elder or invited singer. At the end of the ceremony, the bride removes her veil, bows to her new relatives, and receives gifts or money as a blessing.
- <sup>4</sup> *Toybastar* – This is a special concluding ritual of a celebration. The *toybastar* typically consists of a song or speech that formally closes an important event such as a wedding, birth celebration, or housewarming.
- <sup>5</sup> Marriage (*yilenu toi*) – In the Kazakh context, marriage is not just a legal union, but a complex cultural institution deeply intertwined with family traditions, rituals, and ancestral customs.
- <sup>6</sup> *Bata* – *Bata* is a deeply respected Kazakh tradition of giving a blessing. It is typically performed by elders, religious figures, or esteemed community members on significant occasions such as weddings, childbirth, travel, or the start of a new endeavor.
- <sup>7</sup> *Zhar-zhar* – A traditional Kazakh wedding song performed during pre-wedding ceremonies. It is an antiphonal (call-and-response) song where the groom's side praises the bride's future life in her new home, while the bride's side responds with expressions of longing for her parental home.
- <sup>8</sup> *Synsu* (*syysu*) – A deeply emotional farewell song sung by the bride before leaving her parental home. *Synsu* is a significant cultural tradition that highlights the emotional depth of the transition from maidenhood to married life.
- <sup>9</sup> *Shanyrak* (*shaŋyraq*) – A central and symbolic element of the traditional Kazakh yurt, representing the circular wooden frame at the top of the structure. It holds deep cultural significance as a symbol of family, continuity, and ancestral heritage.
- <sup>10</sup> Great Zhuz, Middle Zhuz, and Junior Zhuz – These refer to the three main tribal divisions (*zhuz*) of the Kazakh people, which historically structured their social and political organization. The Great Zhuz (*Ŵly zhuz*) occupied the southeastern regions of modern Kazakhstan, the Middle Zhuz (*Orta zhuz*) resided in the central and north-eastern areas, and the Junior Zhuz (*Kishi zhuz*) was based in the western territories. These divisions played a role in governance, leadership, and cultural variations among the Kazakhs but were not separate ethnic groups.
- <sup>11</sup> Skullcap (*taŋiia*) – A small, round, and often richly embroidered cap traditionally worn by unmarried girls.
- <sup>12</sup> *Saukele* (*saukele*) – An elaborate, tall, and richly adorned wedding headdress worn by brides during their wedding ceremony.
- <sup>13</sup> *Kimeshek* – A traditional headscarf or hood worn by married women.

- <sup>14</sup> The *dombra* (*dombyra*) is a traditional Kazakh stringed musical instrument, similar to a long-necked lute. It has two strings and is typically played by plucking, producing a distinctive, resonant sound.
- <sup>15</sup> *Kudalyk* (*қыдалық*) – The matchmaking and betrothal ceremony, where the groom's family formally visits the bride's family to propose marriage and negotiate wedding arrangements.
- <sup>16</sup> *Sirga salu* (*сырға салу*) – A traditional engagement ritual in which the groom's family presents gold or silver earrings (*sirga*) to the bride, symbolizing that she is now promised to marry.
- <sup>17</sup> *Uzatu* (*ұзату*) – The bride's farewell ceremony, where she leaves her parental home to join her husband's family.

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