

## CULTURAL HOUSING AND FUNERAL PRACTICES AS SOCIAL TOOLS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RATIONALISM AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

### PRÁTICAS CULTURAIS DE HABITAÇÃO E FUNERÁRIAS COMO FERRAMENTAS SOCIAIS NO DESENVOLVIMENTO DO RACIONALISMO E DA COMUNICAÇÃO NÃO VERBAL

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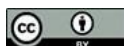
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#### Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify the role of traditional housing and funeral practices of the Kyrgyz ethnic group as mechanisms for the development of rational thinking and non-verbal communication within the context of social organization and ethnic identity. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of philosophical, ethnographic, and cultural literature, as well as the interpretation of ritual elements of Kyrgyz traditional culture from the perspective of social work and interethnic interaction. The methods include comparative and hermeneutic approaches, semiotic analysis of housing structures (yurts), ritual gestures, and funeral customs, including the symbolism of space, color, and objects in traditional culture. The results show that the yurt and funeral rituals not only reflect a philosophical and cosmological worldview but also serve as forms of social regulation, support, communication, and the transmission of moral norms. The spatial structure of the yurt, the division by age, gender, and status, as well as symbolic actions during mourning, function as stable forms of non-verbal

#### Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é identificar o papel das práticas tradicionais de habitação e funerárias do grupo étnico quirguiz como mecanismos para o desenvolvimento do pensamento racional e da comunicação não verbal no contexto da organização social e da identidade étnica. A pesquisa baseia-se em uma análise qualitativa da literatura filosófica, etnográfica e cultural, bem como na interpretação dos elementos rituais da cultura tradicional quirguiz a partir da perspectiva do serviço social e da interação interétnica. Os métodos incluem abordagens comparativas e hermenêuticas, análise semiótica das estruturas habitacionais (yurts), gestos rituais e costumes funerários, incluindo o simbolismo do espaço, da cor e dos objetos na cultura tradicional. Os resultados mostram que a yurt e os rituais funerários não apenas refletem uma visão de mundo filosófica e cosmológica, mas também servem como formas de regulação social, apoio, comunicação e transmissão de normas morais. A estrutura espacial da yurt, a divisão por idade, gênero e status, bem como as ações simbólicas durante o



dialogue within the community. The conclusion emphasizes that cultural forms of dwelling and farewell play a key role in preserving ethnic cohesion, intergenerational dialogue, and strengthening social ties amid the transformation of traditional ways of life.

**Keywords:** Yurt. Ethnic Identity. Non-Verbal Communication. Ethnic Policy.

*luto, funcionam como formas estáveis de diálogo não verbal dentro da comunidade. A conclusão enfatiza que as formas culturais de habitação e despedida desempenham um papel fundamental na preservação da coesão étnica, no diálogo intergeracional e no fortalecimento dos laços sociais em meio à transformação dos modos de vida tradicionais.*

**Palavras-chave:** Yurt. Identidade Étnica. Comunicação Não Verbal. Política Étnica.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the history of philosophical thought, non-verbal communication has been just as relevant as other key issues. The genesis of non-verbal communication remains a subject of debate among scholars to this day. Some researchers believe that its emergence was influenced by factors such as geographical conditions and lifestyle. However, the question of which historical preconditions played a decisive role in the development of non-verbal communication certainly requires further scientific investigation. Nevertheless, we will attempt to briefly explore this issue within the framework of the Kyrgyz people's philosophical worldview.

Historical sources confirm that the Kyrgyz, as representatives of a nomadic civilization, not only led a nomadic way of life but also created a significant cultural legacy that is preserved and utilized to this day. The renowned historian V. Bartold referred to the Kyrgyz as one of the oldest peoples of Central Asia with a rich traditional culture.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how traditional housing forms and funeral customs of the Kyrgyz ethnic group contribute to the development of rational thinking and non-verbal interaction within the context of social organization and ethnic identity.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This study employed comparative and hermeneutic approaches aimed at uncovering the deeper meanings of traditional practices of the Kyrgyz ethnic group and

their role in the development of rational thinking and non-verbal communication. The comparative method made it possible to analyze the cultural elements of Kyrgyz housing and funeral customs in relation to similar phenomena in other cultures and historical periods. The hermeneutic approach focused on interpreting the symbolic meanings embedded in yurt architecture, ritual gestures, and the structural and semantic features of mourning practices, thereby giving the research philosophical depth.

In addition, semiotic analysis was applied to spatial and material components, including the symbolism of color, form, orientation, and the arrangement of objects inside the yurt. Special attention was given to the internal spatial structure of the dwelling, where each element carried specific ethno-cosmological and social significance. The analysis also extended to funeral rituals, including the color of flags, body placement, farewell procedures, and the symbolism of ritual actions. These practices were interpreted as forms of "speaking" material culture that preserve collective memory, transmit social norms and identities, and serve as stable means of non-verbal communication and cognitive orientation within the social structure.

### 3 RESULTS

In the everyday life of the Kyrgyz people, alongside verbal communication, a rich tradition of non-verbal culture developed and was preserved over the centuries. Ritual customs involving body movements and gestures were deeply embedded in daily practices and are widely reflected in epic literature. Thus, non-verbal gestures hold particular philosophical significance in Kyrgyz traditional culture, as non-verbal expression is consistently utilized across traditions and day-to-day interactions within the Kyrgyz ethnic group.

When we examine the daily life of the Kyrgyz people, we observe non-verbal elements present at every stage. Indeed, this form of communication can be said to have a uniquely embedded role in Kyrgyz life. For example, from the moment of a child's birth, various actions and rituals accompany each stage of life, each carrying its own philosophical meaning. Non-verbal cultural components are also found in funerals, guest receptions, weddings, and other ceremonies.

Across all forms of Kyrgyz oral tradition, distinct cultural features are evident in housing, food, clothing, and modes of transportation — the essential attributes of a nomadic lifestyle. These attributes reflect the geographical environment and lifestyle, which in turn shaped the Kyrgyz philosophical worldview. Due to their nomadic and clan-patriarchal way of life, Kyrgyz families lived in small groups within portable dwellings — yurts. Alongside the practical and material aspects of nomadic living, a national code of etiquette also developed among the Kyrgyz.

Studying the etiquette of a Kyrgyz nomad's dwelling provides insights into the internal world and unique spirit of the Kyrgyz people [6]. It is safe to say that Kyrgyz dwellings, adapted to nomadic life, reflect a distinct perception of and relationship with nature. A respectful attitude toward the natural environment was a defining feature of the Kyrgyz ecological worldview. Principles such as living in harmony with nature and avoiding opposition to it were foundational to their ethnic code of conduct. The Kyrgyz dwelling is composed of several parts, each of which carries its own functional and symbolic meaning. Shaped like a circular cone, these structures lack corners, which also carries cultural significance.

The interior of the traditional Kyrgyz dwelling is divided into multiple sections, each with specific functions and symbolic meanings. The items placed within these areas are used in everyday life and each holds specific information. More precisely, the objects inside a yurt conveyed information about the status and age of family members. This can be considered a unique form of non-verbal communication. In other words, the material elements of daily Kyrgyz life "spoke" in their own way. People from outside could interpret the household's structure based on the placement of these items. This form of non-verbal communication solved many social challenges and helped manage time efficiently. Needless to say, such methods are no longer commonly used in modern Kyrgyz society. If we look at household items, dwellings, and other elements shaped by a nomadic lifestyle, they are closely tied to cognitive processes. These elements contain information that is understandable and accessible to all members of society. In essence, they are material reflections of relationships, thoughts, and emotions toward all natural phenomena.

The dwelling, as a central attribute of material nomadic culture, originated in ancient times and was primarily adapted for livestock herding. Evidence from folk

traditions suggests the existence of various types of dwellings designed for relocation and animal husbandry. For instance, some were used temporarily or for expeditions. All housing types shared the conical form mentioned earlier. Scholars still debate why this specific shape was used. Some believe it is linked to nomadic cosmological and metaphysical concepts. National housing was decorated according to the context of social life — for example, celebratory ornaments matched the meaning of the occasion. Mourning and funeral rituals had distinct decorative elements that visually reflected those events. Special attention was given to dwellings intended for the elite or upper classes. These structures stood out in terms of size, beauty, and craftsmanship [8, p.117]. The interior décor, door embellishments, reed mats encircling the yurt, felt ornaments, and wide decorative ribbons used to reinforce the structure were all carefully crafted and symbolically meaningful [7, p.404].

In epic works, it is sometimes mentioned that a national dwelling (yurt) was given to a girl as a dowry upon her marriage. Naturally, such a yurt stood out from others due to its beauty, size, and decorations. According to the descriptions in the epics, the Kyrgyz had two types of military-campaign dwellings:

- A small-sized dwelling without a lattice; these were usually used by warriors and herders to sleep in;
- Another was “small in size, taken along during summer pasture expeditions” [9, p. 34].

As previously mentioned, the decorations in national structures were made specifically for rulers and differed not only in beauty but in the informational content of each element. The clothing and weapons of the guards protecting the ruler's residence indicated their military rank, status, and role. From time to time, the guards would beat drums — and naturally, the sound itself also carried meaning [10, pp. 20–23].

Information about the Kyrgyz national dwelling helps reveal the essence of ancient Kyrgyz traditions, their worldview, and the development of non-verbal communication. The process of assembling the national dwelling was aligned with the movement of celestial bodies. Primarily, the dwelling is understood as an actualized space filled with life — the first level of spatial actualization. Its parameters are strictly organized along quantitative, spatial-temporal, and ethical dimensions.

The spatial-temporal rhythm and dynamics are structured so that the entrance of the yurt faces east — this entrance is considered the point of beginning. From the door, the nomad's dwelling is assembled, followed by the unfolding of circular lattice walls, symbolizing expansion, diffusion, and the filling of space.

A spatial-temporal axis extends from the entrance along the east–west line, at the opposite end of which lies the place of honor (the “throne”), whose semiotic significance is elevated, as it belongs to the elder members of the family. Accordingly, younger family members are positioned near the entrance.

Spatial placement corresponded to temporal meaning and, together, to cosmogonic order: human life moved in the direction of the sun — from its rise (East) to its setting (West) [12, p. 66]. When the eldest family member died (departed to the West), the place of honor was vacated, triggering a shift in the social structure, placing the next youngest member at the beginning (East) [5, p. 81]. In this way, the order of human life mirrored the order of the cosmos — forming the Kyrgyz worldview, where the cosmos is “a home familiar and unthreatening to man” [2, p. 398].

The national dwelling, as a human habitation, becomes a culturally central site of expression where cosmological and anthropomorphic codes intersect, forming a unified conceptual space. This unity reveals the fundamental elements of the universe, arranged in a hierarchical structure.

According to our goal, let us briefly outline how family members are positioned within this national dwelling. Just as elders and younger members are arranged along the east–west axis — where the entrance and the place of honor hold different sacred meanings — men and women are separated along the south–north axis, occupying the right and left sides of the yurt, which also hold sacred opposition.

In the Turkic archaic horizontal model of the world, the upper world — the world of ancestors — was associated with the south, and the lower world — the world of the dead — with the north. In the nomadic home, seen as an “oasis of ordered existence,” the right (southern, upper) side was considered masculine. Here were hung horse gear, hunting and herding equipment, etc. The left (northern, lower) side was feminine, with domestic utensils and a decorative screen concealing food supplies.

The constructive spatial-temporal boundaries for human life thus include anthropocentric coordinates across various cultural spheres. One such sphere is the idea

of the cosmos as an ordered whole, clearly reflected in the east–west and south–north layout of the dwelling. At the cross-point of these axes lies the hearth — the center and vertical axis of the ethnic dwelling — associated with the “World Tree.” The upper end of this vertical axis is the keystone (crown ring) of the entire structure. Its installation was tied to the idea of binding and unification. This task was performed exclusively by men, who raised it using a long wooden pole, while the assembly of the rest of the dwelling was traditionally done by women.

The structural design of the dwelling is based on key elements — lattice walls and a domed top bound by a wooden ring. The dome’s ribs fan out from the crown and press into a resilient frame with diamond-shaped cells, evenly distributing the force [1, p. 116]. The idea behind this design was to distribute the felt-covered dome’s weight toward the base via a resultant force. French architect Auguste Perret once said: “The art of architecture lies in making the supports resonate...”

This “resonance of support” also relates to another feature of the Kyrgyz dwelling: its height is not subordinate to its width. In contrast to the flatter Mongolian and Kazakh yurts, the Kyrgyz yurt’s dome rises more prominently. The verticality of the Kyrgyz yurt approaches the golden ratio (approximately 0.39:0.61). This harmonious scale likely stemmed not only from utilitarian needs but — more importantly — from the people’s profound psychological and aesthetic values. It reveals the desire for harmony with nature, especially in a landscape dominated by towering mountains.

Particular attention must be paid to the circular shape — and the volume built on its basis. The architectural potential of such volumes remains underexplored in modern design. However, there were attempts to apply these forms during the Soviet constructivist era in the 1920s–30s and in European functionalism: for instance, V. Tatlin designed his circular tower-house, and Le Corbusier, using the Modulor (an anthropometric ideal), designed housing in the 1920s.

The organization of the interior space of the dwelling tends toward a three-part vertical division, which serves as an important means of creating the illusion of circular motion within the space and the shaping of its volume. Technically, this effect is achieved through decorative and artistic ornamentation. A wide strip of felt (60–70 cm), decorated with a rich mosaic pattern of colored felt, covers the seam where the upper and lower felt coverings of the dwelling meet. In doing so, it forms a frieze located above the lattice. A

specially woven band with tassels and fringe decorates the circle of the crown ring, separating it from the dome and adding major compositional significance to the dome space. Thus, the alternating horizontal layers visually expand the interior volume, give the structure a sense of static stability, reduce visual tension, and emphasize the interrelation and hierarchy of its parts.

The national dwelling of the Kyrgyz was also closely connected to their religious beliefs. For example, the upper part of the dwelling was considered the main symbol of Tengrism. The circular top of the Kyrgyz yurt's dome consists of a wooden ring reinforced from the inside by cross-shaped wooden rods.

The dome symbolized the equality of:

- The four cardinal directions,
- The four natural elements (earth, water, air, fire),
- The four spiritual principles (reason, power, happiness, contentment).

The entire material and spiritual culture of the Kyrgyz is closely connected to the representation of the dome in the form of a cross. Among the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, the dome was considered a family relic, a symbol of lineage continuation. It was strictly forbidden to turn it upside down or drop it. A son who inherited the dome was also called "the dome." Many rituals, beliefs, proverbs, and so on were associated with this central element of the national dwelling. A woman was not allowed to raise the dome. She could do so only in force majeure situations, when all the men had been killed by enemies. "Speak while looking at the dome of your house" — this was said to those who behaved improperly or spoke too loudly in the home. If blood was found on the dome, it had to be broken apart and burned. Otherwise, evil spirits would not leave the house.

Today, it is difficult to determine how the structural elements of the national dwelling changed over time, but the optimal effect of the existing design speaks to the universality of its perfected structure. The efforts to create this optimal home resulted in a complete form and volume that fit organically into the natural, social, and psychological environment. In its completeness, the dwelling becomes not just a home but the center of the nomad's world: an enclosed, protective space that also allows for external interaction and contact with the wider world.

It is impossible to directly observe the material world and the evolution of non-verbal communication as reflected through the elements of national housing. Therefore,

philosophical studies in this area remain highly relevant. In other words, to study this topic, one must scientifically analyze “the unity of essence and existence, the ideal and the real...” [11, p. 143]. Taking the phenomenon of the nomadic dwelling as an example — its relevance in the past, which faded as a mass form of housing in the mid-20th century due to socio-economic changes and the spread of permanent homes, and then its revival at a new stage of cultural development in the late 20th and early 21st centuries — we can see the invisible: the transformation of the spiritual heritage of the Kyrgyz people. Reflected in the past like in a mirror, the ethnic dwelling acquired a reversed meaning: it changed from a home for the living to a home for the dead. And through this extraordinary effort, the culture preserved a vast body of universal knowledge and cosmological ideas accumulated over centuries.

The development of Kyrgyz traditional culture was rational in nature. Indeed, the philosophy of the Kyrgyz people has formulated a rational approach to the dialectical relationship between good and evil, white and black, life and death, absence and abundance, harmony and conflict in everyday life. Since ancient times, human life has been considered the highest and most precious value for the Kyrgyz. They understood that death is inevitable for everyone and strove to preserve high human qualities throughout life. Thus, the philosophy of life holds great significance in Kyrgyz everyday life. This is because the Kyrgyz understanding of life consists of a system of dialectical laws known as “good” and “bad,” and the distance between them is associated with the space between the eyebrow and the eyelid. Therefore, the emergence of good and evil in Kyrgyz thought is explained as “between the eyelid and the brow.”

A distinctive feature of Kyrgyz philosophy is that a person is morally and psychologically prepared for all of life’s situations. For example, a person leaves a will for their relatives while still alive, and after death, the terms of the will are fulfilled. For instance, it is customary for a person, before or near death, to instruct relatives and children to bury them near the grave of a previously deceased wife or father. Therefore, fulfilling the will was obligatory. Otherwise, it was believed that “the spirit of the deceased would be displeased,” or that the deceased might become angry with their relatives and seek revenge if their final wish was not fulfilled.

The loss of a loved one is the greatest tragedy for any family. However, according to the Kyrgyz mentality, shaped by the nomadic way of life, people did not grieve deeply

over the death of someone who had lived a long life. Instead, they hoped to reach such an age themselves. In contrast, when a young person died, the grief was deeper, and non-verbal mourning rituals were used. In ancient times, the Kyrgyz performed different non-verbal rituals depending on the age of the deceased. For example, if a young person died, a red flag was hoisted on the central pole of the yurt; if a middle-aged person died — a black flag; if an old person died — a white flag. This ritual served as a sign for mourners coming from afar. By looking at the flag displayed on the yurt, one could determine the age of the deceased.

Since ancient times, the Kyrgyz have had a ritual of “informing about the event” when someone dies. This is usually called “bad news.” Therefore, Kyrgyz people traditionally deliver such news to relatives with caution, using special ritual phrases.

The Kyrgyz funeral tradition includes the following non-verbal elements:

*A national dwelling is set up.* When the deceased is brought inside, a man is placed on the right side, a woman on the left. Every Kyrgyz child knows that damp soil or sand is placed under the body — the deceased must be “laid on damp earth.” The body is laid on its back, head toward the door on the left side. Then, the lower part and the face are first covered with a white cloth, followed by a shroud. Even the drawing of the curtain must be performed correctly — at funerals, the curtain seams face outward, while when a bride enters, they face inward. To maintain the physical condition of the body, it is cleaned and wiped several times with a wet white cloth (nose, eyes, ears). In hot weather, mint soaked in cold water is often placed on the body to prevent bloating.

*Weeping:* only women may be present inside the dwelling where the body lies. Typically, the wife of the deceased, daughters, sisters, and daughters-in-law mourn by weeping while facing the wall. The Kyrgyz have a tradition of the “farewell lament” — a cry in song form, words spoken in remembrance of the deceased's good traits. According to ancestral tradition, all dishes and household items are removed from the dwelling where the deceased is placed. This is because, according to popular belief, “the blood of a liberated soul spills, and using items tainted by it is a sin” [3, p. 66]. Men do not enter the house. At funerals, men must wear the national headdress.

*Washing with water:* after a person's death, close relatives wash the body with water, cover the face, and take it to the burial place. If the deceased is a woman, she is washed by three women; if a man, by three men. This is one of the first burial-related

rituals [4, pp. 164–174]. According to Kyrgyz tradition, the body is washed three days after death and before burial. Then it is wrapped in cloth, and the farewell rituals begin.

The funeral dwelling, while mirroring the home of the living, takes on opposing features — with right and left reversed — making the deceased a double of the living. The essence of the deceased's being, unlike that of the living, is “emptiness” as opposed to the “fullness of life.” This asymmetry is expressed in the placement of the body in an empty, undecorated dwelling. Moreover, the space is seemingly “turned inside out”: in the funeral ritual, the carpet is laid outside.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be said that within the framework of ethnic relations policy, the characteristics of ancient Kyrgyz traditions are being studied and given new philosophical interpretations. However, it is important to note that non-verbal communication in the material and spiritual culture of the Kyrgyz has been explored by local researchers mainly within the context of ethical issues. Many Kyrgyz scholars have conducted in-depth studies on moral and ethical problems, grounded in a profound understanding of human dignity. Additionally, they have addressed themes such as happiness, death, and life. Kyrgyz philosophers have sought to affirm a humane attitude toward the balance between life and death, rationalism, and the objective world surrounding the individual. Furthermore, in their study of nomadic funeral rites, scholars — much like the renowned thinkers of antiquity — recognized the natural legitimacy of a person's departure from this world.

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