

Transformation of traditional Kazakh etiquette

Kazakhs had formed more or less stable model of culture of communication by the end of the previous century. It is characterised by combination of elements of modern and traditional cultures.

To date, Kazakh traditional etiquette has not formed a subject of a special study, though fragmentary knowledge about various etiquette norms and description of some standards of behaviour were analysed into most ethnographical works, dedicated to Kazakh traditional culture. Therefore, complex study of different aspects of Kazakh etiquette, determination of its traditional specificities both national and regional, and analysis of their transformation under the modern conditions in various regions are urgent scientific task.

Studying traditional norms of behaviour separately gives an opportunity to reveal different aspects of spiritual culture and public order, which are not analysed by ethnographers. It also allows viewing sufficiently examined phenomena in a new light by including them into the system of moral and ethics.

Modern Kazakh culture includes new and traditional aspects. As a result of modernisation processes Kazakh traditional culture became transforming toward unification and simplification. These processes determine modern regional differences in culture of communication. Those Kazakhs who live in Mongolia observe all etiquette rules and even have preserved some archaic norms (for example, welcoming formulas). Norms of traditional etiquette continue defining behaviour of Kazakhs in rural areas of Kazakhstan. Culture of Kazakhs in Russia and Kazakhs in urban areas of Kazakhstan is losing traditional features and coming closer to European standards.

Analysis of welcoming and farewell norms has revealed that all of them have something in common. The similarities are the basis of culture of communication as a whole and they could be determined as main principles of Kazakh etiquette. They are tolerance, respect for elders and gender differentiation.

Respect for elder person is one of the basic aspects of Kazakh traditional culture. The principle of precedence characterises traditional communities, for which genealogy plays a significant role. Traditionally this principle offered a wider approach to the term “seniority”. Besides the age, it depended on a status of man’s tribal group, his social position, gender, kinship links and his position in family. In modern Kazakh society it is shifted to those who occupy important posts. Nowadays principle of seniority is observed in all etiquette situations with some minor changes.

Kazakh etiquette also defined norms of male and female behaviour (gender differentiation). In traditional society gender differentiation was reflected in norms of communication. Etiquette emphasised man’s domination. Kazakh dwellings were divided into male and female parts. There were male and female etiquette formulations of words, for example greetings.

Nowadays traditional norms of etiquette, which demonstrate male superiority are replacing by European norms. Etiquette of gender differentiation not related to domination/subordination is being lost. Houses in villages and cities do not have division into male and female parts, the differences between male and female greetings are disappearing.

Principle of tolerance is another important principle of communication for Kazakhs. A guest demonstrated his respect for a host by eating his dishes. If a guest refused food it was perceived as an expression of dislike. Mutual invitations for a family party were considered as tolerance.

Rejection was a sign of extreme form of disrespect. Patience toward a guest still exists. No matter how long he stays at a house, a host has to honour him.

Tradition of avoiding conflicts is a unique aspect of tolerance. Husband's parents never criticise their daughter-in-law directly. They rather emphasise their daughter's mistakes and son's wife has to understand that they are talking about her. This norm is still exists in traditional families and rural areas.

To conclude, Kazakhs had formed more or less stable model of culture of communication by the end of the previous century. It is characterised by combination of elements of modern (urban, European) and traditional (archaic, Eastern) cultures.

Despite the transformation, the main principles of Kazakh etiquette are still in force, though they are changing and becoming less formal. It depends on environment (rural or urban), and regions.

Kazakhs still observe the principle of respect for elders. But it has changed as there is no well-established hierarchy as it was in traditional society. Apparently, democratization of family and public relations will lead to its transformation into respect for older persons.

Principle of tolerance also plays a significant role in Kazakh culture. It is not so formal today and reflected in atmosphere of communication rather than in specific etiquette norms.

Principle of gender differentiation has changed most which is connected with increasing equality between women and men.

Modern Kazakh society expresses a strong interest in traditional etiquette. The latter is tending to revive some etiquette norms. Certainly, it is connected with national consciousness of the population after Independence and aspiration for studying the traditional culture.

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