

# Comparative Typological Analysis of Uzbek and Kazakh Yor-Yor Songs

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**Abstract:** Yor-yor songs, a genre deeply rooted in Turkic wedding ceremonies, exhibit both unique and shared characteristics across cultures. This article conducts a comparative typological analysis, focusing on Uzbek and Kazakh yor-yor songs. It delves into various facets, including the role of speech within the wedding ceremony, the performance skills of the artists, the nuanced portrayal of figures, and the presence of magical beliefs. Additionally, it explores the innermost thoughts, dreams, and hopes of the bride and groom, shedding light on their attitudes toward familial and household processes. The article also examines the purposes of rhymed expressions and the significance of symbolic motifs within these songs. By scrutinizing these elements, this study underscores the essential role of yor-yor songs in Turkic wedding ceremonies. Furthermore, it reveals how these songs serve as a medium to convey the deep-seated thoughts, emotions, and experiences of the newlyweds. The comparative analysis between Uzbek and Kazakh traditions offers valuable insights into the rich tapestry of Turkic cultural heritage, contributing to our understanding of the intricate dynamics within wedding rituals.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Central Asia, a land brimming with diverse ethnic groups and a storied history, stands as a testament to the profound beauty of its customs, celebrations, unique traditions, and ceremonies. Over the course of millennia, this region has witnessed the ebb and flow of empires, the intermingling of cultures, and the emergence of its own vibrant tapestry of traditions, each imbued with deep historical roots.

The breadth and depth of these traditions are inseparable from the historical development of Central Asia. This vast region, often referred to as the heartland of the Silk Road, has been a crossroads of civilizations, facilitating the exchange of ideas, art, and traditions for centuries. From the nomadic tribes that traversed its expansive steppes to the great empires that rose and fell within its borders, Central Asia's history is etched into its very soul.

Central Asians have long recognized that the essence of a nation's values and spirituality can be most vividly observed through the lens of their wedding ceremonies. These ceremonies, like prismatic reflections, capture the spectrum of Central

Asian culture, showcasing its diversity, resilience, and enduring beauty.

The evolution and persistence of national traditions, customs, ceremonies, and rituals are influenced by an intricate web of factors, with lifestyle being among the most potent catalysts for change. However, at the core of this dynamism lies a profound respect for heritage, a reverence for the past that informs the present, and a commitment to passing down cultural treasures to future generations. Celebrations, particularly weddings, occupy a special place in Central Asian life. They serve as communal touchstones, bringing together not only immediate family but also extended relatives, neighbors, and close friends. The bonds forged during these joyful gatherings extend beyond the couple at the center of the celebration, weaving a rich tapestry of kinship and neighborly relations. The significance of Central Asian weddings extends far beyond the exchange of vows and rings. These ceremonies are tangible manifestations of the culture, customs, kinship ties, communal bonds, worldviews, religious beliefs, imaginative expressions, and traditional rituals unique to each ethnic group. They encapsulate a

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symphony of emotions, hopes, and dreams, creating a visual and sensory feast that resonates deeply with all who participate. While Central Asia is home to a mosaic of cultures and traditions, the institution of the wedding ceremony stands as a unifying force. Though the specific customs and rituals may vary, the essence of these celebrations remains remarkably consistent: they are moments of beauty, joy, nobility, and dreams. They are a testament to Central Asia's capacity to evolve while staying rooted in its heritage. In the heartland of Central Asia, the legacy of centuries past continues to shape the present, infusing every aspect of life with cultural richness and depth. Wedding ceremonies, as microcosms of this vibrant heritage, exemplify the spirit of unity in diversity, serving as bridges between the past and the future. As we embark on a journey through the diverse wedding traditions of Central Asia, we will delve into the unique expressions, customs, and symbolism that make each ceremony a testament to the enduring beauty of this remarkable region.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In particular, the ceremony of escorting the bride to the groom's house during weddings varies across different regions of our country, but it has a unique manifestation at Karakalpak, Kyrgyz, Uyghur, and Kazakh weddings. Furthermore, even though the "lapars", "yor-yor", and "olan" expressions used in this ceremony complement each other in meaning, they vary based on the location, method, and the identity of the performers. Such differentiation is rooted in various historical and family-household relations.

When studying the early stages of oral creativity in the history of Turkic peoples, it is fitting to reference the customs, rituals, and cultures of many ethnic groups known collectively as the Turks. This is because today's Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Uyghur, Azerbaijani, Ottoman Turk, Tatar, Yakut and other independent nations are descendants of the ancient Turks (Abdurahmanov A. 2006).

In this regard, one can observe specific and similar aspects in examples of oral creativity among Turkic peoples, particularly in relation to wedding ceremonies. For instance, when analysing the setting, performance method, expressive purpose, poetic features, structure, and rhyming of "yor-yor" songs—considered one of the traditional genres of folklore—the shared aspects in the oral works of Turkic peoples become clear. The earliest records of the wedding ceremony can be found in "Devonu Lug'otut-Turk"

by Mahmud Koshgari, a renowned linguist of the 12th century. Numerous terms associated with marriage are explained in this work (Mahmud Koshgari. 1960). Moreover, Alisher Navoi defines the genre of "Yor-Yor" in "Mezon ul-Avzon" as follows: "Also known as 'chinga', 'yor-yor' is spoken by Turkic peoples during weddings. It comes in two types, but one type does not adhere to the 'Aruz' rhythm at all."

The term "Chinga" is also mentioned in "Muxtasar". It appears that the "chinga" genre, which is noted due to the 'Aruz' rhythm, is named after today's 'radif'. It should be observed that most people's 'yor-yors' are created in finger rhythm, and only rarely in the 'Aruz'. Folklorist O. Sobirov describes 'yor-yor', one of the wedding songs, as follows: "'Yor-yor' is one of the songs sung at the girl's party. 'Yor-yor' songs are notable for their musicality, the fact that they are sung by the majority in a certain lengthy melody, and their refrains" (Razzokov H., Mirzaev T., Sobirov O., Imomov K. 1980).

Russian scientists Ch.Ch.Valikhonov, V.V.Radlov, N.F.Katanov, and N.N.Pantusov have made substantial contributions to the collection, study, and publication of the folklore of Turkic peoples. Their research forms the first foundation for the collection, publication, and organisation of folklore works. They have also explored themes and genre characteristics, performance venues, purposes of performance, the degree of influence during performances, the importance of social and domestic rituals, and the unveiling of issues that invite scientific research.

The genres and customs of Uzbek folk wedding ceremony folklore have been studied by scholars such as M. Alaviya, B. Sarimsakov, M. Joraev, S. Davlatov, N. Kuronboeva, O. Ismonova, L. Khudoykulova, F. Hayitova, and M. Murodova. Furthermore, in the scientific research works of O. Safarov, S. Davlatov, O. Ismonova, O. Boqiyev, and A. Abdurakhmanov, "yor-yor", "kelin salom", "kelin tushdi", "betochar", "beshik ketti" and other examples of the typology, territorial-local characteristics of oral creativity have been studied and analysed.

This genre, known as "Yor-Yor" among the Uzbeks, "Jar-Jar" among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, "Noy-Noy" among the Afghans, "Nakhsho" among the Uighurs, and "Xeo'jar" among the Karakalpaks, is a folk song performed in the bride's tradition, handed down from one generation to another. It is of scientific interest due to its impressiveness and the embodiment of performance in a joyful mood, both melodious and festive at the same time.

In Uzbek and Kazakh wedding ceremonies, "yor-yor" songs were primarily sung by the bride's groomsmen and friends. Scholar M. Alaviya states: "Women are the main creators and performers of ritual songs" (Alaviya. -T). In this context, numerous folklore scholars hold divergent views (such as the leadership of female deities in Turkic peoples' mythology). The performance has a local character, and it was occasionally sung when the bride was being taken from the neighbouring house to her father's house, and sometimes when the bride was being escorted to the groom's house.

The traditions related to the wedding ceremony, the organisation, and the holding of various ceremonies or the execution of certain rituals have distinct commonalities and uniqueness among the Turkic peoples. Yor-yor songs possess such unity and originality in performance method, place, tone, participation of performers, local features, imagery, and artistry. In the comparative typological analysis of the Uzbek and Kazakh peoples, the unique aspects of the worldviews, home experiences, dreams, and traditions of these two peoples, along with the ancient life of the Turks, are vividly manifested.

Among Uzbeks, 'yor-yorlar' is traditionally voiced by women, bridesmaids, and friends of the bride when escorting the bride-to-be to her father's house: (this is predominantly conducted on the bride's side). On the day the girl leaves her father's house, she stays at a relative's or neighbour's home. In some regions, this ceremony is referred to as "Qiz saqlandi", "Qizsoq", "Qiz tutildi", or "Qiz majlisi". In our view, the preponderance of expressions relating to the bride's sorrow, thoughts, worries about the gods, and descriptions of the bride and her parents in 'yor-yors' vindicates the chosen place of performance.

The verses above follow a double-rhyming pattern (a-a, b-b) similar to a masnaviy. Here, the words 'yor-yor', which are repeated after the rhyming words, act as a refrain.

Let's draw attention to the descriptions such as 'eyebrows like a pencil' and 'mole like a pea' in this stanza. According to experts, in the oral works of the Turkic peoples, hair and its analogues - hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, beard, thick hair - symbolise fertility and are believed to have a magical influence on prosperity and fertility. (Musakulov A. 2010) Birthmarks on the human body were considered traces of Umay (Umay, patron of babies, god of fertility). Uzbeks also have many idioms associated with moles... The poetic depiction of moles in folk lyrics signifies not just beauty, but is historically linked to ideas of fertility and fecundity... (Musakulov A. 2010).

Mythological views related to destiny are evident in the expressions of the first two verses. If the bride's beauty and maturity are derived from her eyebrows, the description of her moles as being 'written' (typically, moles are round) suggests that her destiny is already foretold on her forehead. The subsequent two verses serve to validate these initial assertions. In other words, it is emphasized, based on a deep-seated conviction, that the bride may not find contentment in her new home; she will not rule the state, she will head the family.

It is apparent that ancient mythological perspectives and magical beliefs hold significant importance in 'yor-yor' songs. Numerous domestic ceremonies, which have become ingrained traditions in people's lives, were also conducted during the weddings of the Kazakh people. The scholarly sources of V.V.Radlov provide ample information about this. Radlov highlights the abundance of lyrically inclined works among the Kazakhs and analyses the ceremonial songs performed at weddings.

It's evident that the process of escorting the bride from her birthplace, her father's house, to the bridegroom's house, accompanied by song, is identical amongst Uzbeks and Kazakhs. The conclusion of the songs with the refrain "Yor-Yor" or "Jar-Jar", the occasional extension of lines to harmonise with the song's content, the emergence of sayings during the performance, and a primary focus on the bride's emotions and aspects relating to her future life, could all form the basis for comparison.

The bride is consoled with the notion that, even though she is departing from her parents, siblings, and other relatives, she will find a new father, a new mother, and new relatives in the bridegroom's house.

The retort given is that, no matter how kind the new parents and relatives are, they cannot replace her own parents and the kin to whom she was born. The grief of the bride's separation forms the main content of these songs.

Above, we analysed the bride's response in the Kazakh "jar-jar". In Uzbek "yor-yor", the houses (or door-yards, signifying homes) of the father and father-in-law are compared.

### 3 DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Rituals took place before the wedding, during the wedding, and after the wedding, and each ceremony held its own position and significance. When the bride leaves her yard to journey to the groom's yard, one of her friends informs the groom's parents about

the bride by requesting water (“ийинми ырап”). The groom then goes to meet the bride. Upon the bride's arrival at the groom's farm, all the neighbouring houses come to express their well wishes: "Bless the bride" and "May the children be happy". Following this, a blessing is given, an animal (usually cattle) is slaughtered, and the wedding commences with the song “То‘y boshlar” (The Wedding Begins). Another young bride greets the bride with a gift - a feather from the tray on which the blessing is recited (amongst Turkic peoples, the interpretation of a bird and feather is related to the fertility cult). Here, the yor-yor song is sung with the consent of the wedding guests. Initially, the jar-jar song is performed by two groups. The groom’s side sings in an upbeat mood, while the women on the bride's side put on more melancholic performances. While the young men hint at the bright future of the bride, the women's performance conveys worry for the bride's new life. This is sung in the jar-jar style.

In the speech, the sorrow of the girl leaving her father's house for a new home is poetically represented by the word "black", and the words of the young men accentuate the bride's grief. It is not surprising that the bride, with her pale face, brings along a “mirror”, a symbol of light and an expression of new life, new happiness, and a new threshold. Symbolic expressions related to colours are uniquely portrayed in both Uzbek and Kazakh yor-yors. Scientist A. Musakulov, who studied the historical foundations of ritual songs, emphasises the magical significance of items such as veils, mirrors, chimildiq, and spoons found in songs, in addition to analysing the purpose of colour symbolism in yor-yor (Musakulov A. 1995).

The parallel appearance of the words chimildiq, dasta spoon, golden lover, khinor, and amulet in the sample proves the creativity of the people and their belief in the magical means of protection (chimildiq, amulet) to safeguard the bride and groom as they embark on their new life. Chimildiq is a ritual item made for the magical protection of the bride and groom, for their happiness and procreation. Maple is a symbol of long life; maple-like height is a symbol of beauty. The act of creating a charm to protect a beautiful bride from the evil eye certainly supports the belief in the magic of the eye. The existence of such beliefs in the ceremonies of the Turkic peoples is inseparable from worldviews in different everyday life.

The young man’s strength and readiness to start a family are represented by the image of a “horse”. In the song, the horse's image is combined with the neighing of a mare on a mountain (the mountain

represents power, it is the dwelling place of spirits, and the area from where news of destiny originates), and it is compared to a young man who has reached adulthood. It's as if the groom's friend senses the bride-to-be's wishes and communicates them to her. Folklorist M. Joraev analyses the image of the horse in his article “Traces of the Ola Horse Cult in the Uzbek Epic” (Joraev M. 1996).

According to folk tradition, a horse's restlessness is not considered a good omen. Its unsettled whinnying often signals an impending tragedy. As can be seen through analysis, the spiritual experiences of the people are portrayed with wisdom in these performances. There's joy on one side, and sadness on the other. The originality of expression also ties back to ancient beliefs.

In the folklore history of Turkic peoples, the horse cult held a significant place, and remnants of it are still preserved in our everyday life to this day (Musakulov A. 2010). Folklore scholars M. Joraev, A. Musakulov, A. Tilavov, and M. Rozieva have conducted scientific research related to the image of the horse and the horse cult within various folklore genres. The presence of the horse's image in lyrical songs and their unique folk expression require thorough analysis. In Kazakh wedding ceremonies, the bride is brought to the groom's house on a horse, its mouth tied with a white cloth. In this process, the mythological traces associated with the horse and its role in the ritual are evident.

## 4 CONCLUSION

People's unique traditions and customs are evident in folk songs. In the above verses, the practices related to the everyday life of the Kazakh people can be seen. Among the Kazakhs, marriage itself had two different forms. The first is the wedding ceremony, which is conducted according to the betrothal method, followed by the bride's "assignment", "wedding" or "bride-taking" ceremony. The second form of marriage arises due to certain circumstances, known as "қашып кету".

In general, yor-yors, considered to be the most unique genre of ritual songs, hold an incomparable place in the oral creativity of Turkic peoples. Identifying commonalities and specificities in the process of comparative analysis, evaluating adequately based on scientific conclusions, and studying traditions from different perspectives requires comprehensive research from today's folklorists.

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