

# How Did the State and Kinship Create Soviet Economy? (Case of Kyrgyzstan) Baktybek Isakov\*

#### Abstract

The Soviet Union was established in about 1920, but due to large-scale processes such as collectivization, World War II, and their negative consequences, the transitional period that followed the establishment was extended to the late 1950s. Rapid Soviet modernization through the liquidation of local traditions was in many places just a show. This essay focusing on local practices argues that the Soviet economy in rural Kyrgyz Republic was created through the interaction between the state and local kinship relations. Moreover, where the Soviet class system was weak in rural areas in particular, kinship relations worked instead. Based mainly on freshly obtained empiric materials from a village in Kyrgyzstan, this article displays the mechanism of how the kinship and the state created an economy in the context of the Soviet rural areas.

#### **Keywords**

Kinship relations, rural Kyrgyzstan, kolkhoz economy, Soviet livestock herding, Sheepherding, Soviet studies

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# Introduction

I remember, said Kozhomkul ata. In the early 1950s, it was a hard time in my life. The time was right after the War. Food shortages. People were working for their livelihood only. Our kolkhoz *[Soviet collective farm]* members used to get their livelihoods from livestock. Each household had several goats or sheep for milking. Although people got their livelihood from animals, sheepherding was the worst job in the kolkhoz. It had almost no good care for livestock, no winter shelters and winter hay. Moreover, there was no good salary. So, everybody used to escape from being a shepherd *[chaban]*, nobody wanted to take responsibility for livestock even though there were always high requirements from 'above'.

Once I heard people saying that a man was coming from the district administration *[raikom]* and was going to talk with the 'elder brothers' *[Uruk zhakshylary]*. The elder brothers were the influential seniors of each lineage grouping in the kolkhoz. Then we heard that one evening the man from the district administration arrived, gathered all the elder brothers at the kolkhoz head's place and told them that the kolkhoz needed more shepherds.

In the following days, Idyrys baike, the 'elder brother of my lineage grouping' found me and said: *-We need someone for kolkhoz sheepherding; you will have to do it.* That time I was 19 and working in the kolkhoz as a mail carrier. I liked my job and did not want to be a shepherd. However, I could not say "no" to him. When I said what happened to my mother, (I had no father) she also said: *-Do not upset your brother.*" (Imanaliev 2010)<sup>1</sup>

This article looks at the first half of the 70-year long Soviet era as the period of transition and at the second half as the period of progress and development. The establishment of the Soviet regime was not easy. Such large-scale processes as collectivization, WWII and their long-term negative consequences marked the period of transition from about 1925 to the late 1950s. More precisely, the process of collectivization in the years of 1925-40 was further aggravated by drought famine (Davies vd. 2006), liquidation of ku-laks<sup>2</sup> as a class, etc. Before the completion of collectivization, WWII broke out and lasted the next devastating four years. Following the war, drought



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and famine occurred again in the Soviet Union in 1947-48. Therefore, social and economic instability marked the next decades: the Soviet economy was unable to recover from collectivization, war and post-war losses by the end of 1950s.

Caroline Humphrey who conducted multi-year field research in the 1960-70s in two kolkhozes in the Buryat ASSR emphasized as one of the main ideas in her book that the late 1960s was a turning point and the beginning of a new stage for the majority of Soviet Republics. Providing evidence from the Buryat ASSR she stressed that traditions belonging to customs and lineage groupings were dominant until the late 1950s, and then following social development and progress, these local practices started to decline (Humphrey 1983: 4-10).

For the Soviet state, uniting tens of different nations with different beliefs and languages into one state and erecting Soviet flags in a variety of climate zones (e. g. tundra, steppe, desert and mountain) was not enough. To exist further the newly founded regime needed to be internalized by all nations of the country. After that, the regime had to take safe steps for its further existence as well as thinking about molding a common Soviet identity. It was obvious that the completion of these long-term processes and objectives would require a long time. In addition, while the regime was busy with such unique matters, the interference of large-scale problems mentioned above made the situation more difficult. Thus, the period of transition was extended and the regime's social, economic and political formation slowed down.

The Kyrgyz who were leading a nomadic way of life in pre-Soviet times, had to go through almost the same miseries. More precisely, between the years of 1925-1940 they experienced forcible sedentarization, a massive resistance of wealthy families to the Soviet regime and their liquidation as a *kulak* class, the period of War and post-war problems. The above vignette totally reflects the post-war picture. Although it is a matter related to the shepherd crisis in a Kyrgyz kolkhoz, it actually highlights that the period of transition was not completed in the 1950s.

According to the story in the same vignette, in rural kolkhozes the local state headsmen applied local practices in order to cope with kolkhoz-based challenges and to avoid their negative consequences. This case shows that

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the *class system* that constituted the core working principle of the Soviet regime had not yet been fully formed in 1950s. That is to say in kolkhoz economic activities, kinship relations functioned where the class system displayed weaknesses. However, this is not peculiar to all Kyrgyz kolkhozes. It merely shows the ways the Soviet shepherd class was being formed in the livestock-oriented Kyrgyz kolkhozes. As to its relevance, this study aims to provide a small contribution to contemporary Soviet studies.

# **Literature Review**

This study is inspired by a puzzle. The interaction between the state and kinship relations during the period of the strong Soviet regime was ignored until nowadays. No scholarly work could be found that explores the relationship between the state and kinship relations in the Soviet era. This possibility came after the Soviet collapse, but very few people were interested in it because by that time these issues had lost their luster. Besides, showing an interest in local practices by the Soviet state would be rather unthinkable since it formed a strong and successful regime with high-modernistic ideologies and innovative attitudes. However, if one digs under every strong and successful case of the Soviet state, especially in the transition period, one may find support of local practices or interactions with them. Therefore, in the scope of Soviet studies, *affect from indigenous practices* should be among the *considerables* nowadays.

As for literature, the earliest Soviet researchers like Kushner (1929), Pogorelskiy and Batrakov (1930) whose works relate to the subject to some extent, do not pay attention to the influence of the local kinship relations in the social and economic lives of people, though they explored the formation of the kolkhoz economies in Soviet peripheries. Works of subsequent researchers (Iliyasov 1955 and Aitbayev 1957) remain limited with introductory and general contents. Notedly, while İliyasov claims that the relatives cooperate with each other for mutual benefits, M. Aytbayev characterizes their social network relations as the practice of backward communities. S. Abramzon who lived among the Kyrgyz people for years and conducted field research in many of Kyrgyz villages dedicated one of the chapters of his monograph to Marriage and Family relations. There he states that the Kyrgyz family and kinship relations changed repeatedly in every decade of socialism within the Soviet modernization and industrialization processes

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(Abramzon 1971: 211-223). But another work of his done in cooperation with K. Antipina and others provided some data on kolkhoz-level kinship relations in the social lives of kolkhozers (collective farmers). In other words while S. Abramzon and K. Antipina (1958: 19-25) conducted comparative research on two Kyrgyz kolkhozes, they admiringly talk about the large number of related families who dwelled in the same neighborhood within the kolkhozes. Further, they ethnographically described how families collaborate, especially how they keep contact with each other in their daily lives. Most importantly, they occasionally point to the possibility of the presence of *closely dwelling related families* in many Soviet kolkhozes. The closely dwelling related families could be found in Soviet kolkhozes in Siberia. It is emphasized that there in the kolkhozes lineage dependency, ethnic principles as well as kin relations strongly dominated the social life of a kolkhoz (Ssorin-Chaikov 2011: 7-44). But all the above-mentioned scholars tend to ignore the effect or penetration of local practices into local administration or state-kinship interactions. Oliver Roy (Roy 2000: 87) reviewed the relationship between the state and local practices for the first time even if it only centered on all of the Central Asian countries. He argues that Soviet collective farms [kolkhozes] were based on pre-existing solidarity groups. To illustrate he cites as an example the case of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, showing how local sub-clans settled in the same neighborhood within the framework of the kolkhoz and how they preserve their basic cores of the pre-collectivization period.

Post-Soviet literature did very little to explore state-kinship interactions in the Soviet period. It concentrates on the post-Soviet impact of kinship relations on local communities of Kyrgyz society. Svetlana Jacquesson (2007) explores the role of kinship and its descent: the local clans and genealogical identities of their subdivisions. Additionally she draws an analytical picture of social contractedness of local clan groups based on marriage rules, seven generations as well as relations within the kinship. Yoshida's (2005: 215-217) perspective is almost the same as Jacquesson; she examines in what way village-level kinship affects the economic life of the people and aptly shows how kinship came to help communities during the post-1990 privatization period in some Kyrgyz kolkhozes. She also offers a wider perspective of the social environment of a kolkhoz prior to collectivization (1920-1930) and the influence on shaping spatial-economic divisions. Kehuast and Dudwick

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(2004: 15) use the terms kin-based network and interest-based network within this context and emphasize that as the eras change, relationships between urban and rural spaces get closer or move away from each other and this affects the slow development of rural space as well as inter-community relations. In other words, *inter-space chasm* brings socio-economic discomfort within the society and the *kin-based network* should shift its nature changing to the *interest-based network*. The works of Jacquesson, Yoshida, Kehuast and Dudwick are most relevant to Kyrgyz social life and they show substantial interest in local practices or kinship relations; however, their focus is on the post-1990 transition period.

This study explores the interaction between the state and kinship relations in the Soviet period and argues that despite some open calls for modernism, kolkhoz and district-level administrators incorporated kinship relations and thus secured further existence of the Soviets in rural areas. More specifically, it asks several questions: how did kinship relations and the state build Soviet economy in rural areas? How was cooperation with kolkhoz-level local practices carried out?

The article is mainly based on field research conducted in the village of Kurtka in Kyrgyzstan in 2008-2011. The village is located in the Aqtalaa district *[raion]* of Naryn province, 40 km away from the district center, about 2,950 m above sea level. See map 1.



Map 1. The location of Kurtka village.

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I visit the village every summer to spend my vacation among my relatives and also conduct my field research there. During my previous research trip, I learned that the village of Kurtka used to be a livestock herding-oriented kolkhoz in the Soviet period during which the villagers experienced very difficult times. This is why I chose the shepherds as the main focus for the study and interviewed a total of 63 men and 46 women, chronologically separating them into two general categories as follows: 1) Shepherds in the years 1930-1960 2) Shepherds in the years 1970-1990. The first category consists of shepherds of the transition period, which correspond to the first half of the Soviet era. The founding shepherds of the kolkhoz are also included in this group. The second category consists of shepherds of the period of development and progress, which corresponds to the second half of the Soviet era. This group also includes those who had been employed in shepherding up until the fall of the Soviet Union. Therefore, I include those who had any direct and indirect relation to shepherd life in Soviet times, such as shepherds' wives, children, relatives and team members in the livestock business.

During the field research only children (who are now 40-60 years old) of the founder-shepherds were interviewed since all of the founders had long passed away. Even establishing contact with the shepherds of this first category was rather problematic: there were few of them left and those who were left were advanced in age. During my annual visits, I would regularly visit the elderly shepherds' houses and rely on help from their sons and daughters in gathering the data. Apart from this, during the Soviet era people engaged in the livestock business were divided into several focus groups in order to clarify the professional hierarchy in the livestock sector and informal networks within it. So the focus groups included animal breeding managers, veterinarians, animal brigades *[ferma]* who worked closely with shepherds in Soviet times: Picture 1 is a picture of them:





Picture 1. Shepherds during Soviet period (Isakov, 2009).

The following chapters elaborate the relationship between the state and kinship relations in chronological order. First, the socio-historical background of the kolkhoz in the years 1920-1950 will be outlined. Then state-kinship interactions will be analyzed within the chronologically designed titles, e.g. shepherds per lineage grouping, shepherds on behalf of lineage grouping, shepherds on behalf of extended families, back to sheepherding, etc., presenting evidence from the selected Kurtka kolkhoz. The conclusions show some of the findings and provide suggestions for further research.

# Socio-Historical Background of the Kolkhoz: 1920-1950

Prior to collectivization, in 1920-1930 there were four major lineage groupings *[uruk]*, namely Zhonaryk, Omoldosh, Sokuchu and Zhamanak in Kurtka valley. They were large groups and each was divided into multiple subdivisions called *Atanyn baldary* (offspring of a single ancestor) (Djunushaliev 2005: 259). In total, more than 30 subdivisions inhabited the valley and all were leading a nomadic life, forming groups based on those subdivisions<sup>3</sup>. In a sense, it means that they were typical semi-nomads.



They had fields for cultivation. But the main sources of livelihood were sheep, goats, cows, horses and camels (Valikhanov 1985: 30-31). In order to provide pastures for the animals they migrated from one place to another according to season. Kurtka valley was their winter quarters. As spring came, they used to leave Kurtka and migrate to the spring quarters, which is about 3.5 km away, and then to the highland summer pasture as the summer came (Aytbayev 1957: 51-52). They lived in yurts *[bozüy]* made of felt and wood all year round. The Kyrgyz people prior to collectivization led a semi-nomadic way of life.

In 1930, the first kolkhoz was founded in Kurtka close to the main stream in the valley. There is no information on whether local lineage groupings had a bearing on choosing the location or not, but based on some evidence on the pre-collectivization settlement of local groups, we may say that a central place was preferred for the local lineage groupings. Furthermore, the subdivisions of lineage groupings were allowed to settle in the kolkhoz preserving their unity prior to collectivization. See Figure 1. After that, households and family groups began to settle in the kolkhoz and build home-type hovels in the spaces allocated for their kin groups.



Figure 1. Spatial divisions of the Kurtka kolkhoz (village)according to four lineage groupings.

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According to the elders, at first the kolkhoz was called *Kyzyl Oktyabr* in 1930 and later renamed three times since the kolkhoz administrative structure and spatial divisions were extended to include neighboring small administrative entities. Their names were *Kommunistchil, Jany Talap* and *Kurtka* (Abaskanov 2008; Abdyrazakov 2008; Choturov 2008; Malabekov 2008)<sup>4</sup>. For convenience I will use only the name *Kurtka kolkhoz*, also because this is the name the village inhabitants now use since it comes from the name of the valley.

Although the settlement process began in 1930, it was delayed until 1938. The first reason for the delay was the transition from a nomadic way of life to a sedentary one. Due to the change in their way of life, the people had difficulty staying in the same place for a long time. The local elderly informants state that households were going to summer pastures leaving the kolkhoz in the warm seasons and coming back to the kolkhoz when it got cool. The kolkhoz administration was unable to stop this way of life and provide them with the necessary livelihoods (Shergaziyev 2008; Myrzaliyev 2008; Abitaaliyev 2008)<sup>5</sup>. The second reason was the local wealthy families' resistance. They were reluctant to settle and never came to the kolkhoz. They did not even allow scores of poor families under their control to settle. After their liquidation in the late 1937, the people moved into the kolkhoz. Thus, the settlement process was completed and the first source of kolkhoz economy was created with animals confiscated from wealthy families. Therefore, the livestock-oriented kolkhoz economy was established with around 400 sheep, 200 horses, 30 cows and 20 camels brought to the kolkhoz after the liquidation. Since the kolkhoz had to face shortages in its early days, the task of milking the animals was distributed among the poor households for their livelihood; a considerable number of camels, oxen and horses were used in daily transportation and cultivation work. As the locals recall, there was no mechanical vehicle in the village until the mid-1950s. Therefore, again in the words of the locals, even food and hand-made clothing materials that were produced in the kolkhoz for the Soviet Army were delivered by those animals to distant auto stations [stantsia]. While this was happening during WWII food and clothes collected in this manner in auto stations in the regional centers were delivered to the front line (Isakov 2010; Kadyrkulov 2010; Zholdoshov 2010)<sup>6</sup>.

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At the beginning of WWII, before the completion of the collectivization process, the duration of the transition period was extended. The years between 1940 and 1950 displayed war and post-war scenes involving drought, famine and epidemic diseases. Up until 1945, all kolkhozes reoriented their production to the war effort, and after 1945 they had to make up for the post-war losses and shortages. Men were sent to war, so the whole workload was left to the children, women and the elderly. For instance, in order to attract all of the women to kolkhoz work, from the beginning of 1940, the Kurtka kolkhoz opened a kindergarten and later an elementary school. While the women were busy working for the kolkhoz, their children were taken care of in the kindergarten and school (Kalmatova 2008)<sup>7</sup>. Elementary schools involved 5 years of education and very few students were sent to boarding schools in district or province centers. In those times, 5 years of schooling was the limit for the whole community, or it was a time when the son of a kolkhoz worker [kolkhoznik] became a kolkhoz worker himself (Matiev 2010; Cherikchiev 2010)8.

This uneducated community could really work well for formal and informal local administrators. In other words, while the kolkhoz members formally belonged to the kolkhoz and kolkhoz administrators, informally they belonged to their own lineages and influential lineage seniors. While they were busy with kolkhoz work under *kolkhoz worker* identity, they actively entered into kinship relations, while at the same time keeping their lineage identity as well. This double identity was a social need and an indispensable necessity for individuals and families. In particular, social events such as marriage, birth and funeral commemorations never happened without the moral and material support of lineages.

#### Shepherds Per Lineage Grouping (1950-1960s)

One evening Bilal, the elder brother of our lineage grouping came home and told to my father: - As I told you before, this year one from your family will have to become a shepherd on behalf of your lineage. I think your second son Samyibek is appropriate for this vacancy as he finished his military service. He will make a good shepherd, I think. Tell him to come to the kolkhoz administration building tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. I will wait for him there and will brief him.

My father said nothing. No family member protested. Because we all knew that each family was providing a shepherd in turn for the kolkhoz livestock herding. This was our turn (Moldaliev 2010)<sup>9</sup>.

This story, as well as the vignette about Kozhomkul-ata in the introduction, is from the same kolkhoz. Both demonstrate the problems with recruiting shepherds in the 1950s. As the vignette in the introduction shows, Kozhomkul-ata was 19 years old in 1950 and had a job that he liked. However, the collaboration between the state and kinship relations made him leave his job and work for the benefit of the state economy. This means that at that time the priority was to provide for a functioning kolkhoz. The livestock was the economic base of the kolkhoz and a source of livelihood for the people. The state strongly enforced the prevention of any possible problems for the kolkhoz economy. Such was the main task of the kolkhoz and district-level local heads. Therefore, those local heads applied local practices or they collaborated with local kinship relations as a solution for the troubled periods of kolkhoz life, such as the lack of shepherds, etc. As empirical data points out, the idea of collaboration was the initiative of the local heads themselves. If we compare this with the Soviet economic mechanisms, we may say that this was much easier and safer than the false financial reports of the Soviet economy. In any case, in situations like this, to pursue production relations to their core, only to find kinship structures, is by now predictable (Peletz 1995: 367). That is why, as the case described in the vignette in the introduction, the head of the district met with the elder brothers of the all the kolkhoz lineage groupings at the kolkhoz head's place to find solution for the shepherd recruitment crisis.

There is no clear information as to what promises had been given to the elder brothers at that meeting, but in the 1950-1960s many of those elder brothers occupied key kolkhoz positions such as Party Organizer *[partorg]*, Chief Breeding Manager *[glavniy zootehnik]*, Accountant *[buhgalter]*, Agronomist *[agranom]*, Warehouse Keeper *[kampachy]*, etc. (Shabdaliev 2008; Sayakbaev 2008;)<sup>10</sup>. It is also still not clear whether they had been in those positions prior to that meeting. However, it is definite that many of them were appropriately trained for those jobs. In other words, a large number of those elder brothers were well educated in comparison with the rest of the kolkhoz folks. Some of them completed high schools in the dis-

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trict center and some were graduates from high schools in regional centers (Myrzaliev 2009; Kasymaaliev 2009)<sup>11</sup>.

According to an archival document entitled Ustav Kolhoza Kommunistchil (registered in 1959) there was a penalty that required 50% to be cut from private lands for those kolkhoz members who were accused of being passive or neglecting collective work<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, the people who disobeyed or disregarded the kolkhoz work first received a warning. Cutting off half of the garden attached to the house did not create much problem, but this had to symbolize public scorn of such a member. For example, one weak-kneed elder brother of a lineage grouping could not provide a shepherd from his lineage grouping for a while. It was considered neglecting kolkhoz work, so the elder brother tried to do some convincing. Some did not listen to him, and those who listened were not appropriate for sheepherding. Later the lineage elders offered the position to a young man named Apil. Nevertheless, he refused. He said that he was working as a tractor driver and liked his job very much. Then the elder brother and the kolkhoz Head took Apil to a district center 40 km away. There the young man was accepted to be a herder. As the people said, the district headman kindly asked Apil to accept to be a herder in the name of his lineage as the other lineage members did, otherwise the kolkhoz would not provide crops to his family members and the garden in his house would be cut and returned to the kolkhoz (Zholdubaev 2010)<sup>13</sup>.

# Shepherd on Behalf of Lineage Grouping

I was given a 300 sheep-strong flock. The relatives (a lineage) provided me some necessary household items so that I could become a shepherd. Our 'elder brother' Idyrys baike and some close relatives kept looking after my herding and me for a while. I always got their support. Into my second year of herding, they assisted with my marriage. I had only my mother and when I got married, I was required to provide payment of 1 cow, 1 horse and 400 rubles for the *kalyn* (payment to bride's parents). I had neither money nor animals. All those expenses of my marriage were covered by my whole lineage. Thereby, I remained a shepherd for 38 years (Imanaliev 2010).

In the early 1950s, the shepherds lived in the mountains far from the kolkhoz center. They migrated from place to place throughout the year with the

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kolkhoz herd, changing pastures and spending their lives in yurts. In hot summers and cold winters they had to stay there facing the elements. The state was not in condition to provide safety and protection for the shepherds. There were no good living conditions for either the people or the herd. Even social and economic activities such as wool shearing and animal birth were performed by hand. Nevertheless, the state was very demanding. It took into account every lost or dead animal in the herd. That explains why everybody avoided being a shepherd and why it was a problem to recruit shepherds for many years (Madymarov 2009; Kocobekov 2009)<sup>14</sup>.

Perhaps it was negotiated between the District Head and the Elder Brothers of lineage groupings that each elder brother as well as all the lineage grouping members were responsible for their shepherds. We can say that the main living facilities that the kolkhoz administration could not provide were provided instead by all the lineage groupings. Each lineage grouping provided a shepherd every two or three years for the kolkhoz livestock and the male members of the lineage grouping always visited their shepherd from time to time in order to lend a hand during the pasture change, migration, weekly animal herding affairs, and brought him food and clothes. For instance, wool shearing in late spring required some physical support, the shepherds used to bring sheep (about 300-400 head) to the kolkhoz center and all his lineage relatives would shear the wool by hand for weeks (Shailoobaeva 2009; Dooronbekova 2009)<sup>15</sup>.

As the above vignette indicates, the young shepherds had their marriage expenses covered by the lineage as compensation. The pre-Soviet tradition known as *kalyn* (payment to bride's parents) still existed. But many families could not afford it. For this reason, the lineage would select young men from poor families unable otherwise to pay the wedding bill.

Besides, the lineage families benefited from the sheepherding services as well. Thus, their limited private livestock were taken care of together with the kolhoz livestock for free. So the kolkhoz members did not have to bother about preparing winter hay or building a winter animal shelter for their private animals since this could be provided by their shepherd relative who looked after them year round (Tungatarov 2009)<sup>16</sup>.



#### Shepherd on Behalf of Extended Families (Early 1970s)

Botokan had four sons: Zarylbek, Kumarbek, Batyrbek and Kamchybek. In 1974-1975, Zarylbek was a chief animal breeding manager in Aktal kolkhoz. Kumarbek was a car mechanic *[avtoslesar]*. The third son was a student in Frunze (former name of Bishkek) and the youngest was in the military service in Russia.

One day in 1974, the head of the Kurtka kolkhoz called Botokan and said: - "We need a shepherd per family group. Talk to your sons and provide a shepherd. Otherwise we will make Zarylbek a shepherd". Zarylbek was the eldest son and the trump card of the family. Graduating from a high school in Prjevalsk city, he was now working in a prestigious job as chief animal breeding manager. Botokan called two his sons Zarylbek and Kumarbek since the other two sons were far away. He said that "Zarylbek is the pride of our family and cannot be a shepherd". They discussed and chose Kumarbek instead of Zarylbek. At first Kumarbek refused but in the end he accepted to be a shepherd instead of his brother in order to save the reputation and honor of the family (Botokanov 2011)<sup>17</sup>.

In the Central Asian understanding of a family, the concept of the importance of a 'male child' and the unity of the relative family is based on a patrilineal principle. In this case, the father is the senior male representing family authority (Firth vd:1969: 476; Geiss 2001: 101-102). This understanding was prevalent in the Soviet state in the 1970s. In other words, through the *respected fathers* the state started to solve the problem of recruiting shepherds. The family that was earlier based on lineage groupings started to lose its importance in the early 1970s. The number of shepherds provided by the lineage was now not enough because of the rapid increase in the population of sheep. Each year aged sheep were sent to abattoir, parts of them perished and disappeared, but still the increase in the number of sheep was very high<sup>18</sup>.

The shepherd crisis was still a contested matter on the agenda at the time when the state began to demand shepherds from smaller units or the extended families in the lineage groupings. Shepherds could not be provided from outside and there was difficulty finding them from within. Therefore, building a relationship with the smallest unit of society or extended families was a new way of shepherd recruitment for kolkhoz livestock in the 1970s.

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Overall statistics show that in the 1970s, in Kurtka kolkhoz the peak in the number of animals was as follows: 26,102 sheep and goats, 510 horses, 301 cows and Tibet oxen  $[yak]^{19}$ . Of all the animals, the rapid increase in the number of sheep number was staggering. In the kolkhoz there were 35-36 shepherds, each responsible for a flock of 500-600 sheep. Living conditions were improving. By that time, separate winter shelters were built for each shepherd around the kolkhoz center. They were now living in the comfort of their own family houses with all the required necessities. Fuel, heating and animal winter hay were prepared by special people, the shepherds would come with their livestock into winter shelters with all provisions, then leave when the winter ended.

Nevertheless, as the locals state people were still trying to steer clear from shepherding. The main reason for this was that sheepherding as a profession was going *out of fashion*. The kolkhoz centers were rapidly changing and many jobs were now mechanized. A wide range of agricultural machinery, motor vehicles and tools were now available, thus increasing machinery related-jobs. In this case, young school graduates were now leaning to shepherd in the mountains, but going to the urban space where they would learn machinery-related professions (Maarazykov 2009; Zhamgyraliev 2009)<sup>20</sup>.

In the early 1970s, there were a large number of young people who graduated from professional schools in the cities of Tokmok, Prjevalsk and Frunze and worked in good positions in the kolkhoz, district and regional centers. Botokan's son Zarylbek from the vignette above was one of those educated young people from among the kolkhoz members. The new educated generation who had been in good positions were new strategic targets during the shepherd crisis of the 1970s. Thus, dozens of them, chief accountants, chief animal breeding managers, directors and even party members were victims of the *shepherd per extended families* policy (like: the son of Karybek who was a 29 year-old member of the Communist Party and who worked as a vicepresident of general public catering *[obshepit]* in the district center). As the respondents said, the Head of Kurtka kolkhoz one day came to Karybek's home and told him straight forwardly: *- Find a shepherd from your family group, otherwise your sons' party membership card [partinyi bilet] will be recalled* (Karybekov 2011)<sup>21</sup>.

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#### **Unskilled Shepherds**

Kadyrbeks' second son Almaz was an unsuccessful shepherd. Kadyrbek and his eldest son Nuraly watched him over his sheepherding period and tried to help him when he needed. However, Almaz could not do this job well. As he was a wheat harvester before, he had no appropriate experience on sheepherding as well as no intention to become a shepherd. He worked as a shepherd for a total of 2.5 years and closed each year with the loss of 40-50 heads of sheep. He had to cover the loss by providing his own animals and those of his siblings. Later his younger brother Damirbek who just returned from military service took the job over from him (Kadyrbekov 2011)<sup>22</sup>.

Another case: Mukai and Murat, the neighbor shepherds, got drunk one evening. That night, several wolves attacked their livestock and a total of 137 sheep were killed. It was a disastrous loss of so many sheep. They had to compensate for the lost sheep, otherwise they would have been imprisoned for several years. The same day they both came to the kolkhoz center made their case in front of whole relatives in tears and asked for help. The Kolkhoz Head was also there as an observer. Some elder relatives stated that such a situation could happen to anyone and ruled that every family should provide a sheep if they could afford it. Right there in front of the crowd the list was prepared and later the sheep were collected (Nurmatov 2009)<sup>23</sup>.

There were many such cases regarding the loss of animals. Today respondents, specifically people who were shepherds in Kurtka at that time, refer to the 1970s as a period of unskilled shepherds. They say that dozens of shepherds, despite the support of their siblings and close relatives, could not prevent large animal losses. Many of those who lost a large number of animals applied to the Kolkhoz Head for help. The Kolkhoz Head did not help directly, but acted as a mediator in the kolkhoz community and he was usually listened to as a local authority. So appealing to a Kolkhoz Head was an easy way to solve a problem and *applying for help* was the proper strategy of unskilled shepherds of those years. Therefore, while the shepherds lost a small number of sheep, they covered the damage with the help of close and distant relatives within the lineage grouping, but those who encountered big losses of animals solved their problem by appealing for the help of the entire kolkhoz community (Dosumbetov 2009; Artykov 2009)<sup>24</sup>.

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However, when we consider the regime and the local economic mechanisms that the state representatives applied, *unskilled shepherds* is not an accurate definition. It seems that all those incompetent shepherds were victims of 'shepherds on behalf of extended families' policy of the 1970s. They failed because they filled the quota by force on behalf of the family group. Forcible recruitment into the profession of the people who were unfamiliar and irrelevant broke the tradition of sheepherding, interfered with the private lives of families as well as created a group of incompetent and failed shepherds.

It was the unskilled shepherds who would sustain the largest animal losses. However, there were other reasons for the loss of animals. For instance, towards the late 1960s, in order to improve the productivity and quality of animal products in the Kyrgyz Republic, they launched the selection and assimilation of sheep. More specifically, the local domestic type of sheep known as *Kyrgyz koy* was replaced with the newly introduced sheep called *Tiyanshanskiy* which was wool product-oriented (Chebodayev 1983: 88-91). In the words of the locals, one reason for the loss of such a large number was due to this new type of sheep because it was not well-adapted to the local geography and climate, and more importantly it proved ill-adapted to a long cold winter.

# Back to Sheepherding (1980s)

In early 1980s there was a movement *back to sheepherding* among the kolkhoz community. Equipping the shepherd based on lineage groupings or extended families, as happened before, now disappeared. People were willingly becoming shepherds, because in the 1980s the livestock sector within the whole country was experiencing its peak of development. At that time in Kurtka kolkhoz, the number of horses reached 600; cows and Tibet yak 1200 and smaller animals such as sheep and goat totaled 48,000 while the Kyrgyz Republic had 1,120,000 small-scale animals (Koychuyev vd: 2007). The state made large-scale investments into this sector and provided very good living conditions for the shepherds as well. In other words, it was a time when a single shepherd looked after 500 sheep and 10 people looked after the shepherd. This means that every part of the livestock sector was now specialized, maintenance was upgraded and the responsibilities of the shepherds were partitioned among other specialists. For example, livestock workers such as a veterinarian *[mal doktur]* and a breeding manager *[zoot-*

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*ehnik]* travelled to the shepherd at least twice a week: one was consulting while the other was treating the sick animals<sup>25</sup>. Additionally, other public servants such as the seller *[dükonchü]*, cashier *[kassir]*, newspaper and magazine deliverer *[gezitchi]* and family doctor *[dariger]* visited weekly or on a monthly basis. In short, in the 1980s, though the shepherds were still living high in the mountains away from the kolkhoz center, the shepherd was no longer alone because of the visits by variety of animal workers in the animal sector<sup>26</sup>.

The government continued investing into the livestock sector: roads to all remote highlands and pasturelands were built, electricity was brought to the yurts, a high salary was paid to the shepherds; gifts and monetary rewards were given to shepherds who fulfilled the plan for meat, wool and semen. Due to a salary, high for a rural area in the 1980s, sheepherding again gained prestige in the public eye. On the one hand, the shepherd recruiting crisis, once a headache for local communities, disappeared completely and thus the interaction between the state and kinship relations was kept to a very minimum.

#### Conclusion

In terms of the establishment of the Soviet Union, we may claim that each community within it built their own 'Soviet state' in the spaces they historically inhabited. This is because those spaces belong to the huge Soviet spatial landscape, which was incredibly complicated with plenty of wide steppes, deserts and mountainous zones. The locals who inhabit those remote peripheries could acquire the idea of Sovietism only from the "center" and built the Soviet-type kolkhozes basing on their own local practices. The idea and the local practices united in order to produce something. It means in peripheries some communities built the "Sovietism" under the conditions of the cold *tundra* zone and started to fulfill plans for the Soviet economy while some founded the Soviets in their forested, highly watered or deserted areas. In terms of Central Asia, the Uzbeks built their Soviet kolkhozes standing on mahalla (Uzbek-style neighborhood) system while the Kyrgyz people formed the Soviet kolkhozes basing on their clan and kinship relations. During the Soviet collectivization in 1930s, related Kyrgyz families settled in the same neighborhoods within the kolkhozes preserving their previous kinship structure and forming one kolkhoz one clan system eve-



rywhere. Moreover, they easily integrated their previous four-seasonal lifecycle tradition into the cattle-breeding strategy of the newly founded kolkhozes. The salaried shepherds of the kolkhoz who were again from the locals worked for the kolkhoz economy using their previous seasonal quarters and implementing their pre-soviet nomadic practices. Thus the "Sovietism" was built in rural Kyrgyz Republic.

Such kinds of local practices were widely applied in many other Soviet kolkhozes. This is because the Soviet Union was a country that consisted of hundreds of local and regional differences and cultural combinations. This study that examines the interactions between the state and local practices in the case of a Kyrgyz kolkhoz recommends the development of Soviet studies. It also highlights the necessity doing research on Soviet kinship studies in different parts of the former Soviet Union.

This article explains how the communities in Soviet periphery managed to integrate their local practices into the Soviet modernization. The locals tried to adopt and blend in with, but when they were weak and helpless with mistakes and failures they took refuge in kinship relations. Furthermore, kinship relations were not only a refuge for difficult situations, but also played key role in the process of formation of the kolkhoz economy as well. As the case of Kurtka demonstrates, by the late 1950s, in many livestock-oriented Kyrgyz kolkhozes, kinship relations went between the state and the locals. Both sides used it as a coping strategy while the Soviet class system was weak until the late 1950s. Even in the 1970s, when the Kurtka kolkhoz felt the weakness of the class system, the clan system or kinship relations had been functioning instead. Kinship relations have never ceased; it seems that they will maintain importance and continue to develop .

### Notes

- 1 Imanaliev Kozhomkul (1932-2012): inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 15 August 2010)*.
- 2 *Kulaks* were a category of relatively affluent farmers in the later Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, and early Soviet Union.
- 3 Each subdivison consisted of about 8-12 relative families, or 40-70 people.
- 4 Abaskanov Kulubai (birth: 1929- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 02 August 2008); Abdyrazakov Berdaaly (birth: 1932 - ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 03 August 2008); Choturov Mukashbek (birth: 1930- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 05 August 2008); Malabekov Turgunaaly (birth: 1929), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 07 August 2008).
- 5 Shergaziyev Isak (birth: 1933- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 07 August 2008); Myrzaliyev Sokubai (birth: 1934- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 11 August 2008); Abitaaliev Omor (birth: 1929- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (interview: 11 August 2008).
- 6 Isakov Zarylbek (birth: 1920-), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 17 August 2010)*; Kadyrkulov Karypbai, (birth: 1938-), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 18 August 2010)*; Zholdoshov Turdu, (birth: 1935-), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 22 August 2010)*.
- 7 Kalmatova Jarkynai (birth: 1933- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 12 August 2008)*.



- 8 Matiev Karybek (1930-2011): inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 20 August 2010);* Cherikchiev Apysh (birth: 1927- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 19 August 2010).*
- 9 Moldaliev Sooronbai (1923-2010): inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 17 August 2010).*
- 10 Shabdaliev Zhoomart (1936-2012), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 17 August 2008);* Sayakbayev Alakai (birth: 1934- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 18 August 2008)*.
- 11 Myrzaliev Jumaaly (birth: 1941- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 07 August 2009)*; Kasymaaliev Urkunchu (birth: 1938- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 10 August 2009)*.
- 12 Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstan. 1959. Ustav Kolhoza Kommunistchil, Aktalinskogo Rayona, yNarynskiy Oblastnoy Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv, Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstanfond. 419, op. 1 (53): 1.
- 13 Zholdubaev Eshin (birth: 1937- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. (interview: 25 August 2010)
- 14 Madymarov Salybai (birth: 1946- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 15 August 2009*); Kocobekov Sadyraaly (birth: 1940- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 15 August 2009*).
- 15 Shaylobayeva Zhumakan (birth: 1943- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 17 August 2009*); Dooronbekova Altyn (birth: 1948- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 22 August 20009*).



- 16 Tungatarov Apysh (birth: 1927-), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan *(interview: 23 August 2009)*.
- Botokanov Kumarbek (birth: 1950- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village,
  Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 12 July 2011)*
- 18 Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstan. 1959. Ustav Kolhoza Kommunistchil, Aktalinskogo Rayona, Narynskiy Oblastnoy Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv, Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstanfond. 419, op. 1 (53): 1.
- 19 Naryn Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstan. 1962. Godovoy Statisticheskiy Otchet o Sostoyanii Jivotnovodstva.Narynskiy Oblastnoy Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv, Kirg SSR, Naryn Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstan. fond. 19, op. 21(66): 18.
- 20 Maarazykov Usupbek (birth: 1951- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 23 August 2009*); Zhamgyraliev Doolot (birth: 1945- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 24 August 2009*).
- 21 Karybekov Temirbek (birth: 1957- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 17 15 July 2011)*
- 22 Kadyrbekov Almaz, (birth: 1958- ): inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 14 July 2011)*
- 23 Nurmatov Mukai (birth: 1959- ): inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan. *(interview: 14 July 2011)*
- 24 Dosumbetov Cursun (birth: 1944- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 26 August 2009*); Artykov Chynaaly (birth: 1948- ), inhabitant of Kurtka village, Aktalaa district of Naryn province, Kyrgyzstan (*interview: 26 August 2009*).



- 25 In the 1980s, there in Kurtka kolkhoz existed a total of about 85-90 sheperds and 17-18 veterinarians (Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstan. 1959. Ustav Kolhoza Kommunistchil, Aktalinskogo Rayona, Narynskiy Oblastnoy Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv, Regional Archive in Kyrgyzstanfond. 419, op. 1 (53): 1.
- 26 He was a seller for 12 years.

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# Devlet ile Akrabalık İlişkiler Ağı Sovyet Ekonomisini Nasıl Kurdu? (Kırgızistan Örneği)

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#### Öz

Sovyetler Birliği 1930'lu yıllarda kurulmuş olsa da kuruluşu takip eden geçiş dönemi, kolhozlaştırma, büyük Sovyet kıtlığı ve İkinci Dünya Savaşı olarak bilinen büyük süreçler ve bu süreçlerin getirdiği olumsuz neticelerinden dolayı 1950'li yılların sonuna kadar uzamıştır. Ülke zayıf ve ekonomi ve sosyal sıkıntılarla dolu olsa da, rejim ülke içindeki toplulukların yerel geleneklerini ortadan kaldırarak yeni sistem kuracağını ve yeni Sovyet kuşağını yaratacağını propaganda ediyordu. Söz konusu döneme odaklaşan bu makale şu hipotezi ileri sürer: Görünürde akrabalık bağları, inançlar ve âdetler gibi yerel geleneklere karşı mücadele veren ve modern bir devlet kurmayı propaganda eden Sovyetler Birliği perde arkasında yerel geleneklerle işbirliği yaparak durumunu düzeltebilmiştir. Sovyet Birliğinin bir uç köşesini oluşturan Kırgızistan'da, daha net olarak bir köyde yapılan sözlü tarih çalışmalarından elde edilen yeni veriler, devlet ile yerli geleneklerin işbirliği sonucunda kırsal kesim Sovyet ekonomisinin kalkındığını gösteriyor.

#### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Akrabalık ilişkileri, kırsal Kırgızistan, kolhoz ekonomisi, Sovyet hayvancılık kültürü, çobanlık, Sovyet çalışmaları

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# Как построили советскую экономику родственные отношения с государством? (на примере Кыргызстана)

# Бактыбек Исаков\*

#### Аннотация

Хотя Советский Союз был создан в 1930 году, из-за крупномасштабных процессов, таких как коллективизация, великий Советский голод, Вторая Мировая Война и из-за отрицательных результатов, процесс создание Советского Союза был продлен до конца 1950 годах. Несмотря на то, что страна была на экономическом и социальном бедствии, режим пропогандировал созданию новой системы, новой поколении, устраняя традиции местного общества. В данной статье выдвинута следующая гипотеза: советский союз, который боролся против местным традициям, родственным отношениям, верованиям, обычаям, улучшил ситуацию работая совместно местными традициями. Историческое исследование, проведенный в одном селе Кыргызстана показывает, что благодаря сотрудничеству местных сельских традиций с государством развивалась советская экономика

#### Ключевые слова

родственные отношения, сельскохозяйственный Кыргызстан,

экономика колхоза, Советская животноводческая культура,

пастушество, советские исследовании

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