

## Images of family roles and authority in literature

### Kyrgyz cultural-historical aspects

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The study aims to analyse the reflection of such key family roles as motherhood, fatherhood, and authority in the works of Kyrgyz literature of different eras, with a focus on the traditional and contemporary aspects. The methodology included comparative-historical and substantive analysis, as well as interdisciplinary approaches combining cultural and literary studies. The analysis of classical and modern Kyrgyz literature has shown that the traditional images of the mother as a symbol of sacrifice and wisdom, the father as a protector and bearer of cultural heritage, and the patriarchal family structure were deeply rooted in literary texts. However, these images changed in the 20th century under the influence of socialism and globalisation. Literature of the Soviet period tended to show the conflict between traditional family values and collectivist ideology. Contemporary literature highlights new family leadership, more equal marriages, and how families adapt to global change. The findings emphasised that Kyrgyz literature was not only a custodian of cultural traditions, but also a platform for discussing social progress.

**Keywords:** gender, traditional society, post-Soviet period, migration, globalisation.

### 1. Introduction

The study of literary works as reflections of cultural values and historical change helps explain how national identity and social norms evolve. Kyrgyz literature, rich in epics, folk tales, and modern works, is a valuable source for exploring family roles and authority. In texts such as the *Manas* epic, Soviet-era, and contemporary literature, family roles shape cultural memory and mirror social transformation. This topic is especially relevant today, when globalisation and social change redefine traditional structures and new family forms seek recognition in society.

Kyrgyz literature of different epochs treats the images of family roles differently (Zhetessova *et al.* 2025). In the traditional epic literature, *Manas*, motherhood is presented as a symbol of sacrifice, wisdom, and preservation of the family. Fatherhood was associated with strength, courage, and responsibility for the fate of the family and the nation. The family was seen as fixed, with strict

hierarchies of authority. During the Soviet era, literature began to reflect new realities: socialist ideology brought changes in the perception of the roles of father and mother, as well as in the structure of family relations (Daurenbekova *et al.* 2024, Papa *et al.* 2025). Women's images became symbols of active participation in public life, and the patriarchal system began to give way to more equal forms of relations.

Kyrgyz literature of the 21st century demonstrates the complex interaction of the traditional and the new. Globalisation, urbanisation and technological progress have changed perceptions of the role of family and authority in society (Efremov 2025a, Doszhan 2023). On the pages of works appear characters who seek a balance between preserving traditions and adapting to new realities. However, there are still gaps in the study of these changes. Most studies focus only on epics or only on Soviet texts, overlooking links to today's literature.

The works of Aslanova (2024) and Baimyrzaev (2024) analysed female images in folklore works, revealing the connection with traditional cultural norms and values. The author studied how female images reflected the ideals of beauty, virtue and social role inherent in certain historical periods. The work emphasised the importance of folklore as a tool for preserving cultural memory and as a way of transmitting gender stereotypes in society. Aslan and Küçükturan (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of fairy tales from two cultures, with a focus on the role in the formation and transmission of gender norms. The authors found that fairy tales reflected social expectations and stereotypes related to male and female roles, and the influence on the perception of these roles in society.

Ergeshova and Alieva (2021) studied the traditional approach to child-rearing in Kyrgyz families. The authors analysed in detail the influence of cultural and family values on the formation of a child's personality, highlighting key aspects of the national mentality. The study emphasised the importance of oral traditions, rituals, and customs in the upbringing process, which have survived in Kyrgyz families for centuries.

Myrzataeva (2024) analysed the depiction of labour traditions in the works of Aitmatov, with a special focus on the story *Jamila*. The author investigated how the work conveys elements of Kyrgyz labour tradition, emphasising the connection to social and cultural identity. The work reveals how, through the characters' images and the interaction with labour, Aitmatov creates a deep connection between personal destiny and the traditions of the people.

The aim of this study is to analyse the changes in the images of family roles and authority in Kyrgyz literature from a cultural and historical perspective, and to identify the relationships between literary traditions, historical context and contemporary trends. This will provide a deeper

understanding of how literature reflects social and cultural transformations, as well as the role it plays in shaping national identity.

## 2. Literature review

In the study by Anarbekova and Zulpueva (2024), the authors analysed the similarities and differences between Kyrgyz and Karakalpak epics, which made it possible to identify cultural and historical features of the reflection of family roles and authority in these genres. The authors emphasised the archetypes of motherhood, fatherhood and collective authority, which are preserved in the epics of both peoples despite the differences in the socio-historical context. The study emphasised the importance of traditional values enshrined in the epics in the formation of national identity, and also pointed to the evolution under the influence of external factors. Beyer and Kojobekova (2019) investigated the gender aspect of political activism in Kyrgyzstan, and contemporary images of female and male roles in the public and family context. The authors analysed how cultural perceptions of female subordination and male authority were transformed under the influence of women's political activism facing patriarchal norms.

Botokanova (2022) focused on the philosophy of gender in traditional Kyrgyz society, which revealed the historical basis for the formation of family roles and authority. The author emphasised the patriarchal structure of Kyrgyz culture, where images of male and female began to be framed through myths, epic texts and oral traditions. Particular importance was given to the role of men as bearers of power and women as guardians of family values, which was reflected in literary and cultural sources. Daharis (2023) analysed the role and position of women in the family from the perspective of Islamic law, which provided an opportunity to highlight the evolution of gender roles in the context of contemporary cultural and literary heritage. The author examined the main provisions of the Shari'ah relating to family duties and authority, focusing on the interpretation in literary and legal texts. During the research, the author revealed how traditional images of women as guardians of family comfort and the influence on the formation of family roles were reflected in texts belonging to the Islamic tradition. In the work of Doraiswamy (2022), the author analysed the cultural histories of Central Asia, including a study of the transformation of social and family roles through the prism of historical and literary heritage. Particular attention was paid to the symbolism of authority within family structures, as reflected in the epic and narrative literature of the region.

Ladzekpo *et al.* (2024) analysed contemporary literary works to examine gender roles and stereotypes. The authors examined how literary texts reflect and simultaneously shape perceptions of family roles, paying attention to the dynamics of gender relations within different cultural contexts.

Special attention was paid to the influence of cultural and historical factors on the stereotyping of images of authority and power in the family. In the study by Ismailbekova and Megoran (2020), the authors examined the role of women in maintaining peace and stability at the level of local communities in southern Kyrgyzstan, revealing the importance of the contribution to social and family structures. The authors analysed how women's images in literary and cultural narratives reflect the influence on family roles and authority in the context of peacebuilding. Particular attention was paid to how the cultural and historical characteristics of the region shape women's identities and the role of women as peacebuilders.

Ismailbekova (2016) analysed the role of traditions in the construction of women's authority using the example of Bulak village, Kyrgyzstan. The author investigated how cultural practices and customs contribute to the strengthening of women's family roles and the influence on local society. The study demonstrated that in the context of traditional society, women's authority is not only maintained but also actively shaped through participation in community and family practices.

The study by Kim (2020) examined the processes of 'refeminisation' of post-Soviet women in the context of modern sociocultural practices in Kyrgyzstan, including virginity rites that symbolise and maintain traditional images of family roles and authority. The author analysed how political and cultural changes that occurred in the post-Soviet period influenced perceptions of women's identity and women's roles in the family. Turning to rituals and the meanings revealed complex links between traditional norms and contemporary realities, providing a context for understanding cultural dynamics and changing family structures.

Kenzhebaeva and Kim (2022) examined the culturally significant ritual of *nebere aluu* (literally 'taking the grandchild') in Kyrgyzstan, which vividly illustrates the transmission of family authority and the symbolic hierarchy within the kinship system. In this traditional practice, grandparents, particularly the paternal grandmother, take the first-born grandchild from their son's family to raise as their own. The ritual, deeply rooted in Kyrgyz nomadic culture, signifies continuity between generations and expresses the social value placed on elder authority, collective responsibility, and the preservation of lineage. It is also closely linked to the concepts of respect and shame (*uyat*), which regulate moral behaviour and reinforce family discipline. Through *nebere aluu*, authority and respect are reaffirmed within the extended family structure: the act of 'taking' the grandchild simultaneously acknowledges the grandparents' moral superiority and secures the transmission of family values. The authors emphasised that the ritual embodies both recognition and emotional tension, as it may provoke ambivalence for the biological parents who experience the loss of daily contact with the child. Nevertheless, *nebere aluu* continues to serve as a mechanism for maintaining intergenerational

cohesion and gendered hierarchies, reflecting the moral economy of Kyrgyz society where motherhood, elderhood, and collective honour are intertwined. The study showed that such practices shape not only public but also personal perceptions of women's roles and family authority, illustrating how the notions of shame and respect sustain social order and cultural continuity in Kyrgyz tradition.

In the work of Mukasheva (2021), the author examined the role of observance of national traditions as an important factor in preserving Kyrgyz identity, which in the context of family roles and authority is of particular importance. The author investigated how cultural practices related to family values are reflected in literary works and contribute to the formation of public perceptions of the roles of men and women in the family. Particular attention was paid to how traditions depicted in literature reinforce social and cultural norms by maintaining the traditional family structure and hierarchy within it. In the work of Osmonova *et al.* (2024), the authors investigated gender stereotypes in family relations in modern Kyrgyzstan, including the psychological, religious, socio-philosophical and cultural-spiritual aspects, which is important in the context of images of family roles and authority. The authors analysed how literary works reflect and shape the perception of men's and women's roles in the family, highlighting the influence of traditional and modern cultural norms on family relations and the development.

Ravshanbekkyzy and Bekturova (2024) analysed the cultural parallels and unique features of Kyrgyz and Native American cultures, which has implications for the study of family roles and authority in literature. The authors examined how traditional values and images of family relationships presented in literary works reflect the cultural characteristics and customs of these societies. It is shown that literary texts of both cultures serve as an important means of conveying ideals and norms that define the place and role of family members and the interaction in the context of cultural and historical traditions. The comparative analysis allowed revealing how traditional family structures and authorities in the works reflect the influence of historical and sociocultural conditions on public perceptions of the family.

In the work of Usupova and Koshbakova (2022), the authors examined the evolution of women's roles in Kyrgyzstan from traditional society to modern conditions, revealing changes in images of family roles and authority in a cultural and historical context. The authors analysed how traditional perceptions of women as keepers of the home and sources of moral education have evolved in the context of modern social transformations. The importance of women in the role of mediators between tradition and modernity was emphasised, which is reflected in literary works that convey changes in family relationships and perceptions of female authority.

### 3. Materials and methods

The methodology of the study was based on the application of the method of analysis, through which changes in the perception of family roles reflected in Kyrgyz literature were studied. The study covered the period from traditional epic to modern prose. The main focus was on literary works that demonstrated the influence of cultural, social and historical processes on perceptions of the family. The texts studied included the Kyrgyz Epic *Manas* (2000), works by Aitmatov such as *Jamila* (1958), *Koš bol, Gul'sary!* ('Farewell, Gul'sary!', 1966), *Ak keme* ('The White Ship,' 1970) and *Al emi kun bir kylymdan ašyk sozylam* ('The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years,' 1980), the novel by Kasymbekov (1980) *Broken sword*. The methods of literary analysis were applied within the framework of the research. The method of content analysis was used to identify key themes and symbols related to family roles.

Comparative analysis across periods revealed how images of the family evolved in Kyrgyz culture. This approach demonstrated the transition from the heroic epic, where the family played a key role in the formation of collective identity, to the prose of the 20th century, where personal conflicts and contradictions between traditional and new values came to the fore. For example, works from the Soviet period highlighted changes in family roles under the influence of collectivisation, urbanisation and emancipation. A hermeneutic approach was used to interpret the symbolism and underlying meanings that were hidden in the descriptions of family roles. This was particularly important when analysing works rich in metaphor and allegory, such as *The White Ship*. The symbolism of the child as a bridge between ancestral traditions and modern culture vividly emphasised the gap caused by social change.

The method of intertextual analysis was used to identify the influence of earlier texts on later works. This allowed tracing how interpretations of family roles and meanings changed according to the interaction with tradition and new literary trends. Particular attention was paid to quotations, allusions, and reminiscences that demonstrated continuity or, on the contrary, a break with previous traditions.

Narrative analysis was another important method that allowed investigating how narrative structure influences the perception of family relationships. Analysing the types of narrators and the ways in which family relationships were presented revealed differences between linear and non-linear structures across genre and era. This deepened the understanding of how artistic techniques served the purpose of conveying emotional or ideological content.

Historical-cultural analysis linked shifts in literary images to specific events. The literature of Kyrgyzstan, beginning with the epic, reflected key stages of history, such as the transition from traditional society to socialist society and on to the modern post-Soviet world. These changes were

reflected in the transformation of family roles, which became more complex and multifaceted. Discourse analysis aimed to investigate the changes in the language used to describe family relationships. In early works, the language emphasised traditional roles through heroic epithets and idealised images, whereas in contemporary prose, the emphasis was on the characters' inner experiences, emotional and psychological depth.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Family roles in Kyrgyz literature: Traditional and modern approaches

In Kyrgyz culture, the family is central both socially and culturally. Rooted in nomadic traditions, the Kyrgyz concept of family emphasises unity, interdependence and collective responsibility. Kyrgyz literature reflects these values by portraying the family as the cornerstone of social order and identity. Central to this portrayal are the complex dynamics of relationships between family members, shaped by traditional values, historical upheavals, and contemporary influences. In Kyrgyz literature, the roles of individuals in the family are endowed with cultural significance. These roles emphasise gender norms, generational expectations and communal responsibilities. Literary representations of family roles illuminate the cultural shifts that Kyrgyz society has undergone, mirroring the evolving social structure of the nation.

The figure of the mother is a recurring motif in Kyrgyz literature, often portrayed as the emotional and moral core of the family. In the traditional context, mother's role embodies the values of self-sacrifice, nurturing and resilience. This image is vividly portrayed in the *Manas* epic, where Manas's mother, Chyyirly, embodies the continuity of heritage and the moral compass for the family. The epic emphasises the role of the mother in shaping the heroes, providing emotional support and preserving family values. For example, the heroine Kanikey, Manas's wife, not only personifies wisdom and resilience, but also acts as a guardian of the family's heritage in times of crisis. Beyond *Manas*, 20th- and 21st-century works expand the mother's image to reflect social change. In works such as *Mother Earth* by Aitmatov, heroines embody the dual role of caring and active participation in society. The symbolism of the mother expands to reflect the double burden of tradition and modernisation. These images echo universal themes of maternal sacrifice and wisdom, but at the same time, the images are immersed in the unique cultural context of Kyrgyz society.

This evolution of the maternal image in Kyrgyz literature can be viewed through three interrelated forms of sacrifice corresponding to different historical periods. Epic sacrifice (mythic), inherent in traditional literature and the *Manas* epic, reflects motherhood as a sacred continuity of lineage and the preservation of cultural heritage. Soviet sacrifice (ideological) transforms this image

into a symbol of duty to the collective, where mothers embody both care for the family and devotion to the socialist state. Finally, post-Soviet sacrifice (social and economic) emerges in contemporary narratives, depicting motherhood under conditions of migration, economic pressure, and rapid social transformation. Through these stages, the concept of maternal sacrifice evolves from mythic endurance to ideological service and finally to social resilience, revealing the changing intersections between gender, history, and national identity.

Children in Kyrgyz literature are portrayed as bearers of family and cultural heritage. The children symbolise hope, continuity, and the future of the community. Traditional narratives often emphasise the role of sons as protectors and daughters as guardians of family honour. These roles are consistent with the patriarchal structure of Kyrgyz society, where lineage and heritage are of key importance. In Kyrgyz literature, the portrayal of children reflects the problems of generational change, illustrating the conflict. This is particularly noticeable in the works of Aitmatov *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* and *The White Ship*. These works explore the contradiction between traditional values and the young generation's desire for independence and modernisation. The young protagonists often struggle with the role as inheritors of cultural traditions, reflecting the societal challenges of adapting to global influences while maintaining national identity. The generational conflict depicted in the literature reflects broader shifts in Kyrgyz society, where the balance between preserving tradition and embracing change creates contradictions within families. Youth struggles over family roles mirror Kyrgyzstan's broader social transformation (Bakirov 2021).

The Soviet period brought about significant changes in the perception of family roles in Kyrgyz society and its literature (Efremov 2025b, Daurenbekova et al. 2021). The collectivist ideology of the Soviet Union undermined traditional patriarchal structures, promoting gender equality and encouraging women to participate in the labour force. This transformation was reflected in the literature of the time, where the family is often portrayed as a unit struggling against the imposition of new values. Kasymaly Bayalinov's *Aigul* captures these complexities. The protagonist copes with dual roles as traditional educator and modern independent individual, emphasising the ideological shifts within the family unit. Similarly, Aitmatov's novel *Farewell, Gul'sary!* examines the impact of collectivisation on family ties and depicts the erosion of traditional values under Soviet influence. In 21st century, Kyrgyz literature, globalisation and modernisation continue to change the concept of family. Writers explore themes of migration, urbanisation and the fragmentation of traditional family structures. For example, in the work of Kasymbekov *Broken sword*, the author examines the displacement of the nomadic lifestyle and the problems of adapting to urban conditions. These stories

depict families struggling to maintain the cultural identity in the face of rapid social and economic change (Bakirov 2021).

The depiction of family roles in Kyrgyz literature reflects the interaction between tradition and change. The figure of the mother appears as a symbol of sacrifice and wisdom, supporting the family in turbulent times. Children, as inheritors of cultural heritage, embody the contradiction between the preservation of tradition and the acceptance of modernity. The Soviet period and subsequent globalisation have significantly influenced the portrayal of family dynamics, introducing themes of conflict, adaptation, and resilience. In works such as *Manas*, Aitmatov's *Mother Earth*, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* and *Farewell, Gul'sary!*, Kyrgyz literature offers an insightful look at the evolving concept of family. These narratives not only preserve the cultural essence of the Kyrgyz people, but also illuminate the adaptability and resilience in the face of societal transformation.

#### 4.2. The concept 'father' in Kyrgyz literature: From epic to modern times

The literary father has changed markedly, reflecting shifts in Kyrgyz society. The study of this image through the analysis of different literary eras from classical epic to modern literature of the 21st century allowed seeing how the perception of the father's role has changed under the influence of historical events and cultural transformations.

In the traditional culture of Kyrgyzstan, the father played a central role in the family as a bearer of moral authority, a keeper of traditions and a link between generations. Epic literature, such as the *Manas* epic, has enshrined the image of the father as the personification of wisdom and moral guidance. In the epic, the father not only provides physical protection for the family, but also passes on spiritual values and cultural heritage to the descendants. Characters such as *Manas*, although not a traditional father himself, is surrounded by senior mentor figures who fulfil this role. *Azizkan*, *Almambet's* father, is known for honesty and devotion. The father's educational principles and instructions symbolise the high moral standards characteristic of traditional Kyrgyz culture. These epic images offered moral guidance and upheld a patriarchal order with the father as unquestioned authority (Saraliev *et al.* 2023).

With the advent of Soviet power in Kyrgyzstan, traditional patriarchal structures began to change under the influence of socialist ideology. The literature of the mid-20th century, in particular the works of Aitmatov, presented more complex and multifaceted images of fathers. In them, traditional notions of patriarchy were questioned. Thus, in Aitmatov's novel *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, the father is shown as a figure experiencing an identity crisis. The image of *Kazangap* illustrates how the characters try to preserve traditional moral principles in the conditions of rapid social change.

Kazangap acts as a bearer of historical memory, but the role as a father is weakened by the destruction of the traditional way of life and the impact of the new collectivist values promoted by the Soviet system (Myrzataeva 2024). In this novel, Aitmatov explores the conflict between tradition and modernisation, which manifests itself through the crisis of family and paternal roles.

*Farewell, Gul'sary!* continues this theme by depicting a generation of fathers who are experiencing the loss of familiar social references. The father in this novel, although remaining a symbol of former values, is faced with the impossibility of adapting those values to the new reality. These images reflect the changing status of the father figure in society, where collective interests begin to prevail over individual family values (Duishembieva 2018).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the literature of Kyrgyzstan turned to exploring the consequences of the destruction of the traditional way of life. Post-Soviet literature often emphasises the father figure who experiences difficulties in adapting to new social challenges. Economic instability and mass migration led to the weakening of family ties, which is reflected in literary works (Table 1).

| <i>The migration dimension</i> | <i>Description</i>   | <i>Examples in literature and real life</i>  | <i>Cultural significance and implications</i>   |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Economic reasons for migration | Lack of jobs and low wages encourage Kyrgyz people to migrate abroad   | Mass labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan. The works of 21st century authors touch upon the theme of unemployment | Economic dependence of families on migrant remittances; increased economic inequality                   |
| Family separation              | Migration leads to a breakdown of family ties, with parents leaving the children in the care of grandparents | Stories describe children “social orphans” who grew up without parents because of the work abroad                      | Loss of emotional ties between generations, difficulties in raising children                            |
| Gender aspects of migration    | Women are increasingly becoming labour migrants, which changes traditional family roles                      | Literature reflects the theme of migrant women   | Revision of gender roles in society; strengthening the role of women as financial pillars of the family |
| Social adaptation abroad       | Difficulties in integrating migrants into new societies, including   | Examples of conflicts between migrant workers and locals in Russia are reflected in journalistic articles              | Increased ethnic and cultural isolation of Kyrgyz diasporas abroad                                      |

|                                       |  |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|
|                                       | language barriers and discrimination   |   |  |
| Impact on cultural identity           | Loss of linguistic and cultural ties with the homeland for migrants and the children             | The theme of loss of native language and cultural traditions among migrant children is raised in literature | Threat of assimilation and loss of national identity in the long term                    |
| Problems of reintegration of migrants | Return to the home country is accompanied by difficulties in adapting to local conditions        | Literature reflects the return of heroes to the homeland, where the perception of local life becomes alien  | Creation of social barriers between remaining and returning migrants                     |
| The role of migration in literature   | Kyrgyz literature uses migration as a symbol of loss and search for the new                      | In the works of contemporary writers, the heroes often face the problems of identity and loss of home       | Emphasises the impact of migration on social values and individual identity              |
| Effect on education                   | Children of migrants are often undereducated due to the absence of parents                       | Stories about the life of rural families show the problem of abandoned schools and lack of teachers         | Decrease in the level of education in rural areas and loss of prospects for young people |
| Globalisation and migration           | Migration accelerates the process of Kyrgyzstan's integration into the world economy and culture | Contemporary writers use the images of migrants to explore global changes in society                        | Promotes modernisation but leads to erosion of traditional values                        |

*Table 1.* Impact of emigration from Kyrgyzstan on Kyrgyz society (sources: Salmorbekova 2022 and Ismailova and Duishenbieva 2024).

In the 21st century, portrayals of fathers reflect globalisation and socio-economic change. In the context of mass migration and technological change, literature portrayed fathers as custodians of cultural memory who tried to preserve traditions and pass these traditions on to the next generations. However, this task became increasingly difficult as the younger generation became more and more alienated from traditional foundations.

Contemporary writers, such as Kaparov (2022), emphasise the contradictions faced by fathers in modern society. For example, in the novel *Traces on the snow*, the father is presented as a character struggling with isolation and loss of meaning while striving to maintain a connection with children. These images emphasise the multi-layered nature of the father's role in contemporary Kyrgyz

literature. The images include elements of traditionalism, identity crisis, and the search for a moral compass. The 21st century literature increasingly portrays fathers as people who are both preserving cultural heritage and searching for the place in the new world.

Shifts in mother and father images signal broader cultural tensions shaping national identity. The mother often embodies stability, continuity, and the preservation of traditions, serving as a moral and emotional anchor during historical upheavals. In contrast, the father increasingly reflects the forces of change, adaptation, and negotiation with the modern world. His gradual transformation from an unquestioned patriarchal leader to a conflicted and reflective figure mirrors Kyrgyz society's transition from pre-Soviet communitarianism to Soviet collectivism and, later, to post-Soviet individualism.

The recurring generational conflict that appears in the works of Aitmatov and his contemporaries' functions not only as a social reflection, but also as a deliberate narrative strategy to dramatise cultural evolution. By placing young characters in tension with their elders, the authors expose the shifting boundaries of identity, faith, and belonging. This conflict becomes a literary device that conveys the idea that the transformation of Kyrgyz culture and family is not optional but inevitable, anchoring the narrative in the dialectic between preservation and adaptation, memory and change.

#### 4.3. Family authority through the prism of Kyrgyz literature: Transformation and cultural peculiarities

Family authority sits at the centre of Kyrgyz literature: it symbolises order and mirrors social values. In various literary works, the portrayal of family authority highlights the tension between tradition and modernity, as well as evolving notions of leadership shaped by historical and cultural shifts.

In traditional Kyrgyz literature, family authority is often portrayed as the link that holds social structures together, ensuring harmony and stability. For example, in the novel *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* by Aitmatov, family hierarchy is the basis for decision-making and interpersonal relations of characters. Reverence for elders, a distinctive feature of Kyrgyz culture, dictates a moral compass for the younger generation. The figure of the *aksakal*, or wise elder, often embodies this ideal, guiding the family and society with accumulated wisdom. Plots often turn on challenges to family authority. In *Jamila*, Aitmatov explores the consequences of challenging traditional roles by focusing on the protagonist's rebellion against societal expectations of marriage and duty. The contradiction between individual desires and family obligations reflects the fragility of established hierarchies and the ability to collapse under pressure (Myrzataeva 2024).

In pre-Soviet Kyrgyz literature, family authority is idealised as an example of social stability. The centrality of this authority reflects the nomadic and tribal structure of Kyrgyz society, where family order ensured the survival of larger communities. Tales such as *Manas*, an epic poem central to Kyrgyz

identity, often portray leaders who embody both family and community authority. The *Manas* hero's respect for elders and commitment to cultural values symbolise the integration of family hierarchy with broader social cohesion. However, authority is not exclusively patriarchal. Women, especially matriarchal figures, also play a crucial role in maintaining family harmony (Table 2). Beckay's character in *The White Ship* represents a caring but firm presence, balancing the expectations of tradition with the emotional needs of the family. This duality emphasises the multidimensionality of power in traditional Kyrgyz culture.

| <i>Period</i>                           | <i>Characterisation of the role of women and elements of matriarchy</i>   | <i>Examples and artefacts</i>  | <i>Social and cultural significance</i>   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Ancient period (until the 10th century) | In early nomadic societies, women had a certain freedom and participated in economic and social life                          | Images of women leaders in legends, participation of women in clan councils                                | Women as guardians of ancestral traditions and wisdom, the influence on education and decision-making in the community                          |
| Age of the Kyrgyz Kaganate              | Women played an important role in maintaining the clan structure, were engaged in the economy, and were educators of warriors | Legends about Kanim, wives of famous leaders; cult of warrior mothers                                      | The cult of female strength and resilience, the importance of motherhood as the continuation of the family and the strengthening of family ties |
| Period of the Mongol Empire             | With the weakening of local traditions, women's role became limited to domestic duties  | Information about patriarchal changes in power structures; folklore reflecting the secondary role of women | Loss of many elements of matriarchy, strengthening of patriarchal norms   |
| 15th-18th centuries (feudalism)         | Women, especially in aristocratic families,   | Historical references to strong women  | Strengthening of patriarchal norms, but   |

|                                 |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|
|                                 | had limited rights but continued to participate in family and clan affairs  | influencing husband-chiefs or sons-in-law   | preservation of women's influence in family and spiritual life  |
| Colonial period (19th century)  | The influence of the Russian Empire reinforced the transition to patriarchal norms, but in nomadic families, women retained rights to manage the households | Historical documents of women's role in resistance to colonisers, e.g., in local uprisings                    | Contradiction between tradition and external influences, preservation of women's importance in preserving cultural values |
| Soviet period (20th century)    | Women gained formal equality, access to education and work, and began to participate in political life  | Example of Kulandeeva Urkuya, who became a symbol of the struggle for women's rights during the Soviet period | Expansion of women's rights, weakening of traditional patriarchy, emergence of new models of women's activity             |
| Post-Soviet period (1991-2000s) | In conditions of economic instability, many women became heads of families, supporting children and relatives   | Examples of heroines in literature reflecting the role of women in migration and economic crises              | Strengthening of women's independence in the context of a crumbling social structure                                      |
| Modern period (21st century)    | Increased role of women in public and cultural life, active participation in politics, science, and business  | Women politicians, such as Roza Otunbayeva, contemporary literature on the role of women                      | New wave of rethinking gender roles, restoration of elements of equality in the context of globalisation                  |

Table 2. Evolution of matriarchy in Kyrgyzstan (source: Botokanova 2022).

The Soviet era marked a dramatic ideological shift that challenged traditional notions of familial authority (Yerdembekov *et al.* 2025). Literature from this period often reflects the contradiction between the collectivist ideals of equality preached by Soviet policies and the deep-rooted respect for hierarchy in Kyrgyz culture. For example, Aitmatov's novel *Farewell, Gul'sary!* criticises the destruction of traditional family roles under collectivisation. The destruction of authority, both familial and social, serves as a metaphor for the larger destruction of Kyrgyz traditions by the Soviet reforms (Duishembieva 2018).

During this period, characters symbolising traditional authority are often contrasted with younger, ideologised figures, highlighting the clash between old and new values. In the novel *The First Teacher*, the protagonist, Duyshen, epitomises the Soviet ideal of equality, challenging established social and familial norms. The transformation of the government from a symbol of stability to an agent of ideological reform reflects the cultural upheavals of the time. The post-Soviet period witnessed a renewed interest in traditional values, and literature reflected a complex reassessment of authority.

For example, contemporary writers such as Talip Ibraimov have explored the dynamics of generational conflict, especially in the context of urbanisation and globalisation. Stories often depict younger characters resisting the rigid expectations of the elders, symbolising a wider societal tension between traditionalism and modernity. This resistance, though uneasy, often results in new forms of leadership and family structure, reflecting the adaptive capacity of Kyrgyz society. Intergenerational conflicts serve as a recurring theme in Kyrgyz literature, often centred on different perceptions of authority. In *The White Ship*, Aitmatov depicts the frustration of a young boy caught between the strict authority of grandfather and the desire for emotional connection. This tension emphasises the fragility of family bonds when authority becomes inflexible or unyielding. Migration and global pressures erode authority, driving the plot and reflecting real social change. Literary images of the erosion of authority often symbolise wider societal shifts, with works from the late Soviet and post-Soviet eras often depicting fragmented families in which traditional leadership roles have been displaced. This fragmentation is not always regrettable; some stories note the emergence of more egalitarian and inclusive forms of family leadership, reflecting the evolving values of contemporary Kyrgyz society.

The notion of authority in Kyrgyz literature reflects the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, acting as both a stabilising force and a site of conflict. While traditional depictions of family hierarchy emphasise the cultural significance of authority as a symbol of order, historical and cultural changes have redefined its role. Literature from the Soviet period criticises rigid power structures, emphasising the ideological shifts of the time, while post-Soviet narratives either reclaim traditional

values or challenge the relevance in a contemporary context. Through intergenerational conflicts and depictions of new forms of leadership, Kyrgyz literature reveals the dynamic nature of authority, demonstrating its enduring importance in shaping both individual and collective identities.

A critical analysis of the findings presented allowed arguing that the literary portrayal of family roles in Kyrgyz culture emphasises the central importance in the formation of national identity. In traditional literature, the emphasis on patriarchal and collective values reflected a social structure based on interdependence and family hierarchy. However, analysis of the works revealed a dynamic transformation of these images under the influence of historical and social change, including the Soviet period, globalisation and modernisation. This reinterpretation demonstrates the ability of Kyrgyz literature to be not only a mirror of culture, but also an active participant in public discourse.

The images of mother and father, explored in detail in the context of traditional and modern literature, were key to understanding the evolution of Kyrgyz society. The figure of the mother continued to represent self-sacrifice and resilience, but in works from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the role expanded, integrating elements of social activism and modernisation. This testified to the importance of women in preserving cultural continuity and adapting to new realities. At the same time, the image of the father transformed from a patriarchal stereotype to a multilayered symbol reflecting both the loss of traditional authority and the struggle to redefine it in the context of social change. The problem of generational conflict emphasised in literary texts was also an important indicator of changes in Kyrgyz society. Analysis of the works of Aitmatov and other authors revealed the significance of this aspect in describing the tension between tradition and modernisation. The younger generation, striving for independence, challenged established values, which provided a dramatic backdrop for the study of family dynamics. These conflicts were symbolic of wider challenges facing society, including urbanisation, migration, and globalisation.

The evolution of family authority in Kyrgyz literature also appears significant in terms of its historical context. The Soviet period contributed to a critique of patriarchal structures while offering alternative models of collectivist leadership. Post-Soviet literature, on the contrary, demonstrated attempts to restore traditional forms of power, but in an updated, adaptive interpretation. Such approaches helped to emphasise the resilience of Kyrgyz culture despite external and internal transformations. Thus, Kyrgyz literature is key to understanding social change and cultural identity. The analysis of the transformation of family roles and authority confirms that literature remains an important tool for both preserving and adapting traditional values in the face of global challenges.

## 5. Discussion

Family roles matter in literary studies because they reflect social change and define cultural identity. Kyrgyz literature, from epic traditions to modern prose, has demonstrated the significance of symbolic, social and psychological aspects of family relationships. Special attention was paid to the dynamics of family roles, which changed under the influence of historical, cultural and social transformations. The study of images of mother, father and children, as well as gender roles and intergenerational conflicts contributed to a deeper understanding of the interaction of traditions with modern realities.

In the work of Alimbekov and Kydyrova (2024) and family roles in Kyrgyz literature, common aspects include the study of the role of the family and gender patterns as key elements of social structure. Both studies emphasised the transmission of cultural and moral values through family structures, linking these values to the sustainability of society. Both studies emphasised the relationship between tradition and change in shaping family roles. The differences were in approaches and emphases: the work of Alimbekov and Kydyrova focused on male gender identity in the context of ancient Turkic traditions, emphasising the historical aspect. The analysis of Kyrgyz literature covered a wider range of family roles, including images of mothers, fathers and children, as well as the impact of Soviet and post-Soviet transformations on these images. In addition, the study of Kyrgyz literature delved into issues of generational conflict, modernisation and globalisation, as reflected in changing family dynamics.

Kim and Karioris (2020) and this paper investigated aspects of family roles and authority in the context of sociocultural transformations. In the study by Kim and Karioris, the authors analysed the impact of economic and environmental factors on the practice of bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan, highlighting the complex interactions between tradition and contemporary realities. Literary analyses of family roles, in contrast, focus on the portrayal of gender norms, cultural values and intergenerational dynamics through the lens of Kyrgyz literature (Isaeva 2024). A common aspect is the focus on the transformation of traditional roles under the influence of social, economic and historical factors. Both studies emphasised how cultural expectations and societal changes affect family relationships. The difference lies in the research methods of Kim and Karioris, who focused on ethnographic and sociological analyses, whereas the literary approach examined symbolism and narrative structures reflecting the evolution of cultural perceptions. Thus, both studies complement each other by combining sociocultural realities with the literary representation.

The work of Murzahalilov (2019) and the study *Images of family roles and authority in literature: cultural-historical aspect* covered similar themes of family structure, traditions, and the evolution in Kyrgyz culture. Both works emphasised the importance of the family as a central element of social and

cultural identity. The studies also emphasised the role of traditions passed down through generations in strengthening family ties. However, in the work of Murzahalilov, the main focus is on the influence of Islam on family traditions and examines how religious norms shape everyday practices and family structure in Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, the literature study pays attention to the symbolic portrayal of family roles and the transformation under the influence of historical and cultural changes such as the Soviet period and globalisation. Common aspects include addressing themes of intergenerational continuity, interdependence of family members and the adaptation to contemporary challenges.

In Saadanbekova's work (2021), the author investigated the role of games as an important aspect of Kyrgyz family culture, focusing on the importance in the transmission of traditions, the formation of collective spirit and the strengthening of social ties. The analysis showed that games contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage through intergenerational interaction. Studies of family role images in Kyrgyz literature also emphasised the mechanisms of transmitting cultural values and traditions through family structures. Both studies revealed the importance of the family as a central institution that determines social and cultural identity. The differences lay in the approach to analysis, Saadanbekova focused on practices and rituals associated with family games as a practical element of culture. Studies of literary images emphasised more on the symbolic meaning of family roles and the change under the influence of social and historical factors. Literary analyses also covered the issues of gender roles and the evolution of family hierarchies, which had not been noted by Saadanbekova.

The choice of language in Kyrgyz literature has played a decisive role in shaping both cultural identity and manifestations of power. The coexistence of Kyrgyz, Russian and, to a lesser extent, other Turkic languages in literary works reflects not only linguistic diversity, but also the dynamics of power and self-representation. During the Soviet period, the use of Russian became a sign of education and state legitimacy, while writing in Kyrgyz symbolised the preservation of culture and resistance to linguistic assimilation. Authors such as Aitmatov skilfully combined these linguistic codes to create multi-layered meanings of identity; his bilingualism allowed him to be a mediator between Soviet universalism and traditional Kyrgyz consciousness. In contemporary literature, a conscious return to the Kyrgyz language signifies an affirmation of national identity and moral authority based on indigenous values. Thus, the choice of language is a symbolic act: it determines who speaks on behalf of the nation and whose worldview is legitimate in the literary space. Through linguistic hybridity, Kyrgyz writers negotiate authority, express cultural continuity, and articulate the tension between tradition and globalisation, making language not just a means of storytelling, but an instrument of cultural sovereignty.

Zhou's work (2024) and the study on images of family roles and authority in Kyrgyz literature are similar in the emphasis on the significance of gender and family roles as cultural constructs reflecting social and historical changes. Both works analysed the transformation of traditional values under the influence of social, political and historical factors. Zhou focused on the concept of equality and justice through historical and philosophical analyses, while the study of family roles emphasised the reflection of these roles in literature as carriers of national identity. A common aspect was the study of the evolution of traditional notions of gender and authority in the context of modernisation and cultural change. However, the study of Kyrgyz literature detailed the dynamics of intergenerational conflicts, especially under the conditions of Soviet collectivisation and globalisation, which was not a key focus of the work of Zhou. In addition, the study of Kyrgyz literature focused on the symbolic aspects of the images, such as the mother as the embodiment of sacrifice and wisdom, while Zhou focused more on the philosophical aspects of the images. Zhou paid more attention to the philosophical and legal aspects of gender concepts.

The study underscores that family roles in Kyrgyz literature are core to cultural identity and reflect social change. The analysis of literary images reflected the transformation of traditional ideas about mother, father, and generations under the influence of historical processes such as the Soviet era, modernisation and globalisation. The study revealed the interaction of traditions with modern realities, which allowed literature to become an active participant of public discourse, recording both the preservation and adaptation of cultural values to new challenges.

## 6. Conclusions

The family, as the most crucial element of Kyrgyz culture, occupies a central place in the country's literary heritage. The image of the family in Kyrgyz literature is closely linked to historical and social changes in society, reflecting shifts in the understanding of family roles and relationships. In the traditional context, the family was the foundation of social order, where the values of unity, interdependence and collective responsibility played an important role. These ideals have been largely preserved in Kyrgyz literature, where the family is portrayed as a stable social institution that preserves the national identity and spiritual foundations of the people.

One of the key figures through which family authority is expressed is the mother. In the traditional context, the mother embodied moral authority within the household, representing self-sacrifice and nurturing wisdom. She was not only the emotional centre of the family but also the custodian of cultural traditions. These motifs are vividly represented in the epic *Manas*, where Manas's mother symbolises steadfastness and continuity, shaping her son's sense of duty and moral compass.

In the works of the 20th and 21st centuries, the image of the mother evolved, acquiring new features that reflected the transformation of female authority. In Aitmatov's *Mother Earth*, the heroine personifies both traditional moral power and the capacity for social leadership, embodying the dual authority of care and participation in public life. Thus, maternal authority, once confined to the domestic sphere, extends into the social and moral domains of modern Kyrgyz society.

The father figure traditionally symbolised patriarchal authority, serving as the moral guide, protector, and bearer of cultural memory. In the epic and early prose, the father was the unquestioned centre of decision-making and discipline, representing the link between generations. However, the Soviet and post-Soviet periods brought significant transformations to this image. In Aitmatov's *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* and *Farewell, Gul'sary!* paternal authority becomes conflicted and vulnerable, reflecting the erosion of traditional hierarchies under the pressures of collectivist ideology and social change. In modern literature, fathers often appear as figures striving to reconcile the loss of traditional authority with the need to adapt to new socio-economic realities such as migration and urbanisation. Their authority is reinterpreted as moral rather than coercive, emphasising understanding, empathy, and cultural preservation over strict hierarchy.

Children, as bearers of family and cultural heritage, also embody transformations in authority relations. While traditional Kyrgyz literature depicted children as subjects of guidance and discipline, modern narratives often show them as questioning or negotiating inherited norms. Works such as *The White Ship* and *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* portray intergenerational conflict as a dialogue between obedience and independence, where authority is redefined through mutual respect and emotional connection rather than unquestioned submission. These dynamics symbolise the broader cultural adaptation of Kyrgyz society to globalisation and individualisation.

The Soviet period led to a deep restructuring of authority within the family. Collectivist ideology sought to replace patriarchal dominance with state and ideological authority, leading to tension between traditional hierarchy and socialist equality. Literature of this era reflects this struggle: the family becomes a microcosm of the conflict between old and new systems of power. Aitmatov's works capture the disintegration of established authority and the moral void left by social transformation, showing that moral leadership within the family must be rebuilt on new ethical foundations.

In the post-Soviet and contemporary period, Kyrgyz literature revisits the theme of authority in the context of migration, economic hardship, and urbanisation. The weakening of traditional family structures and the rise of female-headed households have contributed to the reconfiguration of authority roles. Contemporary authors portray authority as more flexible, shared, and emotionally grounded, moving away from rigid patriarchy toward a model based on mutual responsibility and

respect. This shift indicates the adaptability of Kyrgyz cultural identity and its ability to reconcile tradition with modernity. Thus, Kyrgyz literature demonstrates that authority has evolved into a multifaceted and dynamic concept reflecting broader social transformations. From the moral authority of mothers and the patriarchal guidance of fathers to the emerging egalitarianism in contemporary families, the evolution of authority mirrors the cultural journey of Kyrgyz society itself. Literature continues to serve as both a mirror and a mediator of this process, preserving traditional values while redefining the meanings of power, responsibility, and moral leadership in the family.

To deepen the topic, future research could analyse how shifting forms of authority affect the roles of women and youth in the context of migration and urbanisation. Comparative studies with other Turkic literatures would also allow for a broader understanding of how authority and family values transform under globalisation. The main limitation of this study remains the limited availability of primary sources, especially works from the Soviet and pre-Soviet periods.

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