

FOOD SYSTEM AND TRANSFORMATION OF KARAKALPAKS

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Abstract: The food system of the Karakalpaks, an ethnic group in Uzbekistan's autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, showcases a blend of nomadic traditions, fishing culture, and modern adaptations. Traditionally, their diet was rooted in pastoralism, fishing, and basic agriculture, featuring meat, dairy products, fish from the Aral Sea, and simple staples like wheat and millet. Preservation techniques such as drying and fermenting were vital for survival in harsh climatic conditions. However, significant transformations have occurred over the past century due to environmental, political, and social changes. The Aral Sea disaster drastically reduced fish availability, disrupted livelihoods, and caused a shift toward imported and processed foods. During the Soviet era, collective farming introduced new crops and modernized agriculture but altered traditional practices. In recent decades, globalization and urbanization have further changed dietary patterns, with younger generations consuming more processed and imported foods. These shifts have led to challenges such as food insecurity, reduced access to traditional ingredients, and the loss of cultural food heritage. Efforts to revive traditional practices, such as fishing and celebrating local cuisine through cultural festivals, aim to preserve Karakalpak identity. However, environmental degradation and limited agricultural output continue to pose significant threats. Addressing these challenges requires a sustainable approach that balances modernization with cultural preservation and environmental restoration.

This study highlights the resilience of the Karakalpak food system amidst adversity and underscores the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with innovative solutions to ensure food security, health, and cultural sustainability.

Keywords: Karakalpak food system, Aral Sea disaster, nomadic traditions, food security, environmental degradation, traditional practices, cultural preservation, globalization, dietary transformation, Uzbekistan.

In the modern world, there is no sphere of culture that has not been affected by globalization. One of the most conservative spheres of human activity, food culture, has not remained on the sidelines. In modern studies, food culture is understood as “a set of phenomena in human activity that are associated with food and nutrition (eating) – sets of food products, methods of their processing, technologies for preparing dishes and culinary products, recipes, traditions of food preferences or food restrictions and prohibitions, diet, forms of organizing meals, table etiquette and rituals” .

The significance of the phenomenon of globalization in modern research is becoming one of the most popular areas. An assessment of its positive and negative impact on the life of ethnic groups has yet to be made. This article is an attempt to consider the consequences of the influence of globalization processes on the traditional nutritional practices of the Karakalpaks. Today, the border between the city and the village is very conditional, however, this conditionality does not extend to nutritional practices. There are certain differences here. Elements of traditionalism continue to prevail in the nutrition of the rural population, while city dwellers increasingly prefer to use borrowings from the cuisines of other peoples in their nutrition. Uzbekistan is a

multinational country. Representatives of various nations and nationalities live in the republic, especially in the cities. Due to the fact that the city is a place of active interaction between various ethnic groups, the interpenetration of cultures is especially intense here. In the urban environment, the Karakalpak food culture was noticeably influenced by Uzbek, Russian, Uyghur, Korean, Tatar and many other cuisines. In addition, transformations in food practices were caused by changes in the surrounding natural and social environment, lifestyle, everyday life, socio-economic development of society, etc. As researchers G. Zununova and R. Nazarov note, an important factor that influenced the change in the traditional food system was the emergence of new products and crops, new types of culinary processing of food, new types of utensils and technical devices

According to field research materials, transformation processes in the Karakalpak food sphere began in the 1960-70s. New dishes were preceded by the borrowing of some vegetable crops. Potatoes and other types of vegetables in Central Asia, according to Kushelevsky, appeared with the conquest of the region by the Russian Empire, "Potatoes, beets, cabbage and cauliflower, tomatoes, etc. were not used by the natives, but with the arrival of the Russians (them) they began to grow for sale... Potatoes and cabbage began to be included in the diet of not only the urban, but also the rural native population" [2] . Among the Uzbeks, potatoes, Russian cucumbers, cabbage, tomatoes, radishes, eggplants, zucchini, etc. began to be widely cultivated from the beginning of the 20th century. According to Shakhnazarov, by the end of the 19th - beginning of the 20th centuries, potatoes entered "into general use in the entire Tashkent region" [3]. We are talking about the central and south- eastern part of Uzbekistan. These vegetable crops appeared on the territory of Karakalpakstan later. Traditionally, Karakalpaks ate carrots, onions, and pumpkins. These crops were grown everywhere. The introduction of new vegetable crops began in the middle of the last century. The new vegetable crops were not immediately accepted by the population: "Potatoes appeared in the 1940s and 1950s. They were sold in stores from autumn until late winter. People did not buy potatoes, so they were given in addition to flour. The population did not immediately learn to eat potatoes" .

Tomatoes were adopted by the Karakalpaks, according to oral reports, in the 20th century: "Tomatoes entered our cuisine in the post-war years - 1947-48, before that the Karakalpaks did not use them" . After the population realized the advantages of the new crop, tomatoes began to be used as a seasoning for soups, and as an independent dish. Tomato and cucumber salad became one of the common cold dishes in the Karakalpaks' diet. By the mid-1970s, tomato salad in Nukus was a must-have dish on the table: "Our house was always crowded. In addition to ourselves, numerous relatives and acquaintances came. It happened that at lunch, in addition to the main course, she served a salad, for the preparation of which a whole bucket of tomatoes was used. Since there were many people at the dastarkhan, the salad was placed in 7-8 places".

Throughout the 20th century, Karakalpak cuisine was actively supplemented with dishes of other nations. Communication between people of different nationalities within the republic contributed to the mutual exchange of experience in the field of nutrition. This exchange significantly enriched the traditional Karakalpak cuisine. The diet was significantly expanded due to the preparation of new, previously unaccepted dishes. For example, dishes of Uyghur and Dungan cuisine - manti, lagman, and Tatar cuisine - belyashi, chak-chak - have long been introduced into Karakalpak cuisine. From Russian cuisine, the population has adopted borsch, okroshka, vareniki, pancakes, aspic, etc. Korean dishes are very popular - rice noodles (funchoza), kuksi soup, salads (che) from Chinese cabbage, fern, seaweed, asparagus, raw, potatoes, appetizers from raw fish (he), pegodya, etc. According to respondents, Korean cabbage salad - chimchi, began to be

consumed in the 1970-80s . The modern daily diet of Karakalpaks is now unthinkable without Korean cabbage. If plov is cooked for dinner, then chimchi is always served at the table.

According to the stories, in rural areas, dishes such as manti and pelmeni began to spread after the 1970s: "We learned to cook manti and pelmeni only in 1975. My brother married a girl from Muynak, and she taught us these dishes. Another brother married a girl from Khalkabad. She taught us how to bake cookies and waffles. At that time, there was not much variety in cooking. Most often, they boiled meat broth. Sometimes they cooked gurtik or plov" . In recent decades, fast food restaurants have become popular among urban youth: pizzerias, hamburger, shawarma, doner, etc. Older city dwellers prefer cafes and restaurants with a clearly expressed ethnic character - Uzbek, Korean, Turkish. Rural residents traditionally prefer to eat at home. Thus, it can be said that since the second half of the 60s of the 20th century, under the influence of socio-economic and socio-political changes, as well as the rapidly developing processes of globalization, noticeable changes have occurred in the nutrition system of residents of Karakalpakstan. These transformations continue at the present stage: new dishes and methods of processing food products are being borrowed. First, innovations are introduced in the urban environment. The capital of the republic - Nukus, due to the fact that it is an administrative center, and also a multinational city, is one of the first to perceive innovations, which then spread to other cities and villages.

The Karakalpak food system is a testament to the community's resilience and adaptability in the face of profound environmental, political, and societal changes. Rooted in their nomadic heritage and reliance on the natural bounty of the Aral Sea, traditional practices emphasized self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. However, the catastrophic effects of the Aral Sea disaster, the influences of the Soviet era, and the forces of globalization have drastically transformed their dietary patterns and cultural practices.

Today, the Karakalpaks face significant challenges, including food insecurity, health risks associated with processed foods, and the erosion of traditional culinary knowledge. Yet, amidst these difficulties, efforts to preserve and revitalize their food heritage are gaining momentum. Cultural festivals, sustainable farming practices, education initiatives, and policy support are integral to balancing modernization with the preservation of their rich traditions.

The Karakalpak experience highlights the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with innovative solutions to ensure food security, promote health, and sustain cultural identity. As environmental and societal pressures continue to evolve, the Karakalpak food system serves as a model for resilience, demonstrating how communities can adapt while maintaining the essence of their heritage. By addressing these challenges through collaborative efforts, the Karakalpaks can ensure that their culinary traditions remain a cornerstone of their cultural identity for generations to come.

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