



# The impact of labour migration to Russia on the status of *kelin* in rural Kyrgyzstan

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# *Aim, research question*

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The aim of the project is to look on the influence of labor migration to Russia on the changing status of Kyrgyz daughter in law *kelin* and her relations within her family in rural Nookat, Kyrgyzstan

- The **main questions** are:
- How mobility of migrant *kelins* influence on their status?
- How do *kelins* deal with new and old roles?
- Do *kelins* get empowered after migration?





# Theoretical concepts on migration and mobility

- Migration theorists Ernest Georg Ravenstein explained concept of migration in 1885. The scholar used the term **push pull factors** to explain the process.
- The law works when people have unfavorable, conditions in one place to push them out and favorable conditions in a new location that pull them out.
- The **Dual labour market theory** also is best to describe the situation with labour migration in Kyrgyzstan. According to theory, the migrant workers are not pushed across the international borders by the economic conditions in their home countries, but the migrants are pulled by the constant demand for cheap external labour in high wage countries
- The other important theory for this thesis is **new Economics of Labour Migration theory**. According to this theory, it is not an individual who decides to migrate to improve the situation, it is the decision of the whole family to improve the situation of the household.
- Pitirim Sorokin, American sociologist who introduced the social mobility theory in 1959. . According to Sorokin social mobility is a movement, it stands for change in the position of an individual occupying some social position or a group of individuals from one status to another. In Kyrgyz society *kelins* are socially mobile, their positions change according to the location.

# Historical background on traditional Kyrgyz family

- Pre-Soviet period
- Soviet period
- Modern Independent period



# Labour migration issues of Kyrgyzstan

- Kyrgyzstan is a state with population of more than 6 million, women make up 50.7%, men- 49.3%, children make up 2.1 million according to UNICEF (2017) data.
- According to the National Committee of Statistics the percentage for people living in poverty for 2017 make up 25,6 % of the population.
- The main receiving countries are Russia and Kazakhstan. 11. 6 million foreign migrants resided in the Russian Federation in 2015. According to figures from Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS), as of 4 December 2015 there were 542,928 Kyrgyzstani citizens (327,982 men and 214, 946 women)
- About one million of Kyrgyz people of working age are labour migrants in Russia by some estimates. The areas of work are construction, service, trade, utilities, transportation.





- According to IOM report (2018): remittances are financial or in-kind transfers made by migrants directly to families or communities in their countries of origin.
- When remittances are viewed as a percentage of GDP, the top 5 countries are Kyrgyzstan (at 35,4 %) followed by Nepal (27,9%), Haiti (27,8%) and Tonga (27,8%) in 2016. (IOM report 2018, 31p.)
- Most of labour migrants receive Russian citizenship. Many Kyrgyz citizens have 2 passports.
- The decision to work in Russia is not individual, it is a family decision, a strategy to support family financially.

# Research based on

- Countries outside Central Asia

The existing literature on the impact of migration and remittances is mostly focused on Latin America, Africa and East Asia, where this phenomenon has existed for decades. The common conclusion of these studies is that remittances improve child and household welfare.

- Countries of Central Asia

Research on migration in Central Asia is limited. A common problem for researchers is the lack of reliable data on labor migration and left-behind families. The existing studies which investigate the impact of labor migration on economic development in CA agree that labor migration helps to reduce poverty and unemployment, and to neutralize political tensions in the country. Remittances help migrant families to sustain everyday expenses.





# Nookat district, Kara Tash village

- Village established as collective farm named Kalinin in 1958
- The total area- 80,11 square km
- The total number of residents- 14500 females- 6922 males- 6740 (2018 January, data taken from village administration)
- The total number of households- 2157
- Ethnicity data- Kyrgyz-11433 Russians-2 Uzbeks- 2186, other- 1
- School children- 1814
- Children attending local 4 kindergartens- 500
- External labour migrants – 3748
- Internal labour migrants- 1283

# Methodology

- Qualitative interviews
- 11 mothers in law, age 47 -87
- 7 daughters in law age 27-40
- Residence- Nookat, Kara-Tash village, 6 women have higher education, but majority have only secondary education or incomplete higher.
- The length of the interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes.
- Snow ball sampling, total 16 mothers in law,7 daughters-kelins



# Kelins

- Aidanek is 29, married, has no children, her education is secondary, she worked as a cook in Sahalin, north of Russia.
- Anara is 30, married, has 2 children, her education is secondary, worked as a shop assistant in Moscow.
- Zuura is 28, married, has 1 child, her education is secondary, now she is completing her preschool study. She worked as a baker at school cafeteria in Moscow.
- Jazgul is 40, has 2 children, her education is non complete higher, she was going to be a biology teacher. She worked in the cleaning service in Moscow.
- Nurgul is 30, married, has 3 children, her education is higher, she is a history teacher. She worked at the cafeteria in Novosibirsk.
- Saikal is 30, she has 3 children, her education is higher incomplete. She worked in Moscow as street janitor.
- Rosa is 33, she has 5 children, her education is secondary, and she worked in Moscow as street janitor and at cafeteria.

# Kainenenes

- Alymkan is 66, she is widow, has 12 children, her education is secondary.
- Ajar is 71, she is widow, has 7 children, her education is secondary.
- Aigul is 68, widow. She has 6 children. She studied only 3 classes of primary school in Soviet time.
- Batma is 72, widow. She has 6 children. Her education is secondary.
- Dilde is 69, widow, she has 11 children, and her education is secondary.
- Elnura is 54, she is married, she has 4 children, her education is higher, and she is a Russian language teacher.
- Jamilya is 60, she is married, has 4 children, she has secondary education
- Kalicha is 47, she is married, has 5 children, her education is secondary.
- Seidana is 87, widow, she has 2 children. She studied only 4 classes of primary school.
- Aisha is 75, she is married, and she has 7 children. She graduated 9 classes of secondary school.
- Shariza is 60, married, she has 5 children, her education is higher, and she is a teacher.



# Findings

- Age of marriage today, comparison with Soviet experience. Past and present of *kelin* institution.
- Marriage: strategies, wedding. Role of *kelin*, role of mother in law- *kainene*
- Family life, financial support of parents
- Rights and obligations of daughter in law
- Labor migration of *kelins* to Russia, money, occupation, status change
- Situation of children left in Nookat. Challenges for grandparents and *kelins*



- Analyzing the data gathered from *kelins's* answers in rural village of Southern Kyrgyzstan we can see the tendency for the girls with secondary education to marry young.
- Girls with higher education usually marry later. Two out of seven *kelins* married at 17. Two women married at 19. One informant married at 22, the other woman married at 25. Only one *kelin* married at 30. The bride kidnapping was popular in village in 1990s. Three *kelins* out of seven reported that they were kidnapped.
- The ideal age to marry for the informants was around 20 - 22. Most of the women explained it by the ability of young woman to care for family in law, her own future children, to get the Higher education.

- The marriage life for *kelins* are connected with many hardships. Migration is a social process which influences *kelins'* position much. As most of the husbands left for Russia the burden of family life has increased for the wives left in Kyrgyzstan.
- *Kelins* left in Kyrgyzstan are engaged in field works, responsible for household keeping, children's education and upbringing. The difficult part of the marriage life is to build strong, good relations with a mother in law, who is an important figure in family in law structure. Mostly parents in law support the newly married couples, but it depends on the financial status of each family.

- Ainura, 60 shares her thoughts related to the role of *kelin* and *kainene*, and compares *kelins* in past and present.
- “The role of *kainene* is be an advisor and diplomat. I save up the money of my children, as they can spend it fast. The role of my *kelins* to know their status. But I also understand them, as they also want to keep the money, and I am not against their wish. *Kelins* cook, clean, shows respect for parents in law. In Soviet time *kelins* had strong health in comparison with modern *kelins*. Now *kelins*’s life is easier. There is a washing machine, and other household appliances. Now *kelins* cannot work hard, their organism is weak. My *kelin* had missed abortion twice, so I am worried for her health, and do not let her carry a full bucket of water.”

- The important section of questionnaire was devoted to the rights and obligations of *kelins*, according to Abramzon (1990) the young daughter in law, *kelin* has many obligations.
- Jazgul, 40, replied that her duties are to cook, clean. Her rights as *kelin* are to tell her opinion, to suggest something and to buy her personal things. She also adds that there is a difference between city and village *kelins*. Village *kelins* have more duties, and the most important one is to show deep respect for family in law. Her usual day starts from 6 a.m. from cleaning the house and ends late at night after making bed for family members.

- According to the data gathered for this research, most of rural *kelins* work or have worked in Russia. Their first work experience was to accompany husbands, and mostly *kelins* go to work as migrants after the marriage, or after giving birth to a first child. Five *kelins* worked in Moscow, one worked in Sahalin and one migrated to Novosibirsk.
- The popular occupations of *kelins* in Russia were cooks, streets janitors, and workers in shopping, catering sectors. This tendency can be explained by the dual labor market theory.
- The living and working conditions in Russia are not good, according to *kelins'* responses they must work, as mostly the whole family in law and her children depend on their earnings in Russia. It became a joint family venture for rural people to improve financial situation in Kyrgyzstan.

- Nurgul, kelin, 31 went with her husband to Novosibirsk in 2012 first, leaving at home her two toddlers. They worked well, and did not return during three years. She worked at a cafeteria.
- The money earned the couple sent back to his parents, they built some housing, bought a car for her father in law, spent for some celebrations, weddings. The mother in law was responsible for managing the money the couple earned in Russia.
- She also replied that she did not feel that her status changed somehow. She participates in decision making of her family, but almost never speaks out, but if she has some needs, her mother in law gives her some money.

- The informants participated in this research- young *kelins* are mostly at their reproductive age, the youngest 28 and the eldest 40. Most of the *kelins* in this research have 3 children.
- They described their emotions related to children as difficult experience, because most of them had to leave their toddlers when they were around a year. The consequences of their labor experience in Russia as some *kelins* explain are the cold relations with children left, who are grown up now, and attached to care givers more than to their biological mothers.
- Zuura, kelin 28 described her emotions when she left her child as heartbreaking. “At first it was difficult to be far from a small baby who I was breastfeeding, I left him with my mother in law, and missed him a lot, but later I get used. But the feeling that I did not breastfeed him enough was strong in me for long period. I returned back, when he was about 2 years old. I stayed with my son for 10 days and returned back to Russia. Now my son is 10 years old.”

- Ajar, kainene 71 shares the following:
- “My son and *kelin* worked in Moscow as street janitors. It was good, they sent money every month, I used some part for everyday life expenses, and the rest I saved up. They returned to Kyrgyzstan and bought a car, repaired the house. It is good that they can work in Russia. The relations of my son and *kelin* do not change, my son is strict. But I hear in village many *kelins* change after working in Russia, they do not want to live in the village any more, they get used to city life. My neighbor’s *kelin* came and took her children.”
- Most of mothers in law are in their 50-60s, and it is difficult for them to care for small children, but it is a necessity. The hardships are to cook, clean, wash, to educate children. Some mother in law told that the hardest was to care for her teenage grandson. At this period they are difficult to control, they do not obey like small children.

- Elnura, kaine, 54 being a teacher explain the situation of the children left behind in details. Below is her story:
- “It is a dilemma, on one hand mothers are pushed to work in Russia, as there are no jobs here, it is good they earn money, but on the other hand children who left miss the precious thing the mother’s care and love.
- It is preferable for *kelins* to stay with her children especially in teenage period. It is an important period. In Kyrgyzstan the suicide rate is high among teenage children, and mostly, almost 80 % of vulnerable children are kids of labor migrants.
- Migration affect negatively on children’s psychological health. I wish all kids grow up with their parents. I work at school, the children of labor migrants are mostly noticeable, their clothes are not ironed, the hair is not cut, of course grandparents do their best, but they cannot replace own parents.”



## Conclusion

- The mobility of migrant *kelins* does not influence on their status much, as according to informants' data there is no change.
- Rural Kyrgyz *kelins* deal with new and old roles differently, some *kelins* try to keep old traditions of obedience, some *kelins* after gaining new roles of breadwinner, try to stay in the city and not return to the village.
- *Kyrgyz rural kelins* mainly do not get empowered after labor migration to Russia.

