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Kyrgyzstan civil identity formation: Semantic phenomenon and interethnic relations

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Abstract

Relevance. The complex geopolitical situation attempts at revenge by former empires, and the temporary occupation of sovereign territories in the centre of Europe – all these factors make the issue of civic and national identity relevant, especially for citizens of the former Soviet Union.

Purpose. The study aims to address the factors shaping the civic identity of Kyrgyz, in particular, the semantics of the native language and relations with neighbouring ethnic groups.

Methodology. An empirical study was conducted, including a survey of representatives of the younger generation.

Results. The study revealed positive dynamics of national Kyrgyz identity over the years of independence, from 3.1 million people in 1999 to 5.5 million people in 2022. The growth of national consciousness is also reflected in linguistic identification – more and more citizens speak Kyrgyz “fluently” (76%) or “well” (11%), while the influence of Russian, on the contrary, is declining. At the same time, a threat to the purity of the Kyrgyz language was identified due to the large number of words of foreign origin borrowed from Russian semantics. In the course of the study, recommendations were made to increase the prestige of the use of the Kyrgyz language and its original words in everyday life. A survey conducted among third-year students of the K.Sh. Toktomamatov International University revealed the main attributes of national heritage popular among young people and the current vision of geopolitical threats to Kyrgyzstan statehood. An analysis of innovative instruments that promote the development of national identity in the country was conducted.

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Conclusions. The study reveals a growing Kyrgyz identity in Kyrgyzstan, evidenced by increased Kyrgyz language proficiency and national consciousness among youth, while highlighting challenges such as the “russification” of the language and the need for strategies to promote modern Kyrgyz usage.

Keywords: national identity; mother tongue; intangible heritage; self-identity; threat to independence; self-identification

Introduction

In times of total globalisation of most spheres of human activity, every ethnic group on the planet needs to preserve its own national identity and pass it on to future generations. In addition, national identification is an additional deterrent to potential aggressors wishing to conquer foreign territories under the guise of “liberating their citizens”. The need to form and preserve the civic identity of Kyrgyz has been repeatedly addressed by leading scholars both in the Kyrgyz Republic and around the world. For instance, A. Aidaraliev and M. Madaliev [1], studying the formation of socio-political entities of independent Kyrgyzstan, noted that, despite the long absence of its own state and imperial claims of its neighbours, the Kyrgyz nation managed to preserve its identity and individuality.

T. Bazarkulova et al. [2] described the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition and modernisation. When interacting with empires or states that, for several reasons, were at a higher level of socio-economic formation, it was important for Kyrgyzstan at all stages of its history to use its potential for its development. Thus, during the Soviet occupation, the Kyrgyz Republic managed to give additional resources to improve its economy, education, healthcare and science. Regarding the future of the country, it is worth addressing such a factor of socio-cultural transformation as the civic identification of the younger generation. E. Nusubaliev et al. [3] surveyed 117 students at Kyrgyz universities and concluded that education, media and state policy are key factors in the formation of national identity. In addition, the study proved that a younglet civic identity is crucial for lifestyle, values and social role.

G. Tekir [4] shared a vision of a special way of development in Kyrgyzstan. Highly appreciating the most democratic governance of all Central Asian countries, the author nevertheless concludes that the “power of the crowd” has a great influence on political processes in the Kyrgyz Republic. Consequently, the national identity of citizens formed under the influence of ochlocracy values creates considerable uncertainty in the political future of the country. Several revolutions in the Kyrgyz Republic removed corrupt officials from power but have failed to form a coherent constructive agenda. Continuing the theme of social upheavals experienced by the Kyrgyz Republic since independence, we should also mention the work of K. Ash [5], who studied cases of ethnic violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan. The riots between different ethnic groups in Osh in 2010, which resulted in human casualties, are, following the author, a projection of the problems of civil society, when individuals deprived of state social support within the framework of the industrial system are forced to form communities based on outdated traditional values, i.e. national or ethnicity.

It is noteworthy that inter-ethnic clashes in Osh did not lead to a mirror reaction in neighbouring Uzbekistan, where the Kyrgyz diaspora is quite large. N. Megoran and

S. Rakhmatullaev [6] believed that the precise actions of the Uzbek authorities, which revived the discourse of “international friendship”, helped, first, to extinguish this conflict at the stage of formation, prevented the escalation of interethnic relations and even possibly prevented an international conflict. This, according to the authors, was not so much due to the greater maturity of Uzbek civil society, but rather to the greater controllability of citizens. P. Lottholz [7], describing a vision of the key discourses of social order in Kyrgyzstan, regarded the formation of the identity of the citizens as increasing the value of human life, and freedom of expression, but at the same time preserving unique cultural characteristics. The analysis of the hierarchical, regressive and exclusive consequences of the revolutionary reforms demonstrates that the usual dualism of “democracy/authority” is not fully suitable for shaping the image of the future of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The primary basis of any national identity is its language, and Kyrgyz are no exception. Therefore, to fully explore the peculiarities of national identity, it is necessary to consider the semantic phenomenon of the Kyrgyz language. R. Alimov [8], studying the origin of the modern Kyrgyz lexicon and the semantic meaning of words, proved the existence of several Mongolian borrowings. The many such borrowings, including reverse borrowings, prove the proto-Turkic origin of the Kyrgyz language and the continuity of the Kyrgyz nation from the Shanyuu Mode and the Turkic Khaganate. Similar conclusions were also reached by K. Kabylov and A. Usmanova [9] – their study of the semantics of imperative statements in the modern Kyrgyz language identified syntactic concepts or mental images behind the signifiers and revealed the mechanisms of change in the prototypical meaning of folk vocabulary over time. In turn, N. van der Heide [10], having spent two years in the Kyrgyz Republic, studied the Kyrgyz folk epic *Manas* and saw in the image of the epic hero an archetype of autonomy, as well as the readiness to fight for self-determination.

Thus, the process of self-identification of Kyrgyz residents has been repeatedly studied by the international scientific community, but without addressing the complex impact of all linguistic factors. The study aims to address the factors of formation of the Kyrgyz civic identity, the influence of semantic features of the language and interethnic relations within the country on this process.

Materials and Methods

In the course of this study, various aspects, factors and trends in the formation of the civic identity of the Kyrgyz population, the impact of the popularisation of the state language on the formation of the Kyrgyz nation and the peculiarities of relations with representatives of other ethnic groups living in the country were considered. To determine the dynamics of self-identification processes, we analysed the 2022 census data of the Kyrgyz Republic and compared the number of the resident population by ethnicity with similar indicators for 1999 and 2009. The

population growth for the periods in question was calculated separately for the country as a whole and by ethnic group; graphs and bar charts were created for greater clarity on key time series.

To study the language aspect as an important element of identity, dynamic data on such indicators as the proficiency of the most numerous ethnic groups in their native language and statistics on the languages that respondents called their second language were compared. A separate study was conducted on the distribution of the adult population in terms of the level of proficiency in the Kyrgyz and Russian languages. Moreover, as part of the study of the development and popularisation of the state language in the Kyrgyz Republic, the effectiveness of the joint project of Ulut Soft and the National Commission on the State Language and Language Policy under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic to develop the Kyrgyz language with the help of artificial intelligence (AI) was studied [11]. In addition, the article analyses the phenomenon of substitution of several Kyrgyz words and expressions with Russian surrogates, providing relevant examples. In addition to a negative assessment of this semantic process, several measures were proposed to restore the classical Kyrgyz lexicon and revive traditional hermeneutics, which should help strengthen the national identity of citizens.

In addition, a generalised and holistic picture of inter-ethnic relations in the Kyrgyz Republic with representatives of other ethnic groups and the most numerous diasporas – Uzbek and Russian – was formed. The study analysed the major inter-ethnic conflicts in the villages of Iskra and Mayevka and the city of Osh, their possible impact on the formation of the civil identity of Kyrgyzstanis and developed recommendations for preventing such incidents in the future. Among the materials used in this study, in addition to those already mentioned, data from the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic [12], the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, reports of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan on the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination [13], and Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 140 “On the state language of the Kyrgyz Republic” [14] were used.

In the framework of determining the current trends in the formation of civic identity, a survey of 75 students and 75 third-year female students of the International University named after K. Sh. Toktomamatov was conducted among the youth of Kyrgyzstan on the following three questions: “What is your national identity?”; “What is the most important intangible value of the Kyrgyz people?”; “Which state, in your opinion, poses the greatest threat to the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz Republic?”. In addition, employing extrapolation based on the identified statistics, expert opinions, as well as the data received and processed, the conditions for further strengthening the civic identity of the people of Kyrgyzstan were predicted.

Results

The Kyrgyz ethnic group was influenced by many factors throughout its long history and only at the end of the twentieth century was it able to form within the borders of

its nation-state. Modern Kyrgyz should know and respect the history of the creation of their nation. Initially, the Kyrgyz nation was formed through a complex mix of representatives of various ancient nationalities and tribes living on the lands of present-day Kyrgyzstan – ancient Turkic, Mogul, and Kipchak. The ancient ethnonym “Kyrgyz” is mentioned as early as 200 BC in the Historical Notes (Shi Ji) by the ancient Chinese historian Q. Sima [15]. The further development of the people is mentioned in numerous later Persian and ancient Turkic sources – there is evidence that until the sixth century, the so-called “Yenisei Kyrgyz” living in the Yenisei River valley were under the rule of the Turkic Khaganate. After its collapse, the ancient Kyrgyz founded their own Kyrgyz Khaganate and became one of the largest independent Turkic ethnic groups that influenced the formation of the ethnopolitical history of all medieval peoples of Central Asia [16].

Later, after the outbreak of wars of conquest in the region, a significant number of Kyrgyz were forced to gradually move to the Tien Shan region, where in the territories known as Moghulistan in the 15th and 16th centuries the ethnogenesis of the Kyrgyz people was finally completed, marked by the creation of the national Kyrgyz language. The lands of Moghulistan, which included, in addition to parts of modern Kyrgyzstan, significant areas of the Tien Shan and the Seven Seas, became the sacred territory where scattered Kyrgyz tribes united to occupy the most attractive pastures of the Prytlan Shan and formed a single Kyrgyz ethnic group. Knowledge of the historical and geopolitical factors that shaped this ethnic group is a crucial condition for contemporaries claiming to be representatives of the Kyrgyz people.

The dynamics of the growth of national identity are particularly evident when comparing census data from different years. The updated information on the ethnic composition of the population and its linguistic characteristics published in 2023 by the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic demonstrates several important trends. In particular, Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the resident population of the Kyrgyz Republic by ethnicity, broken down by the three most numerous ethnic groups – Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Russians.

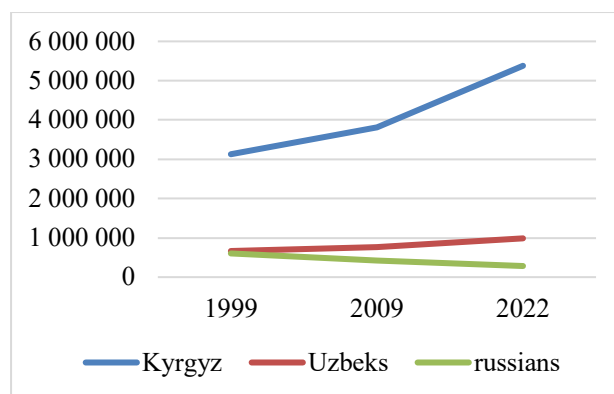


Figure 1. Number of citizens by ethnicity, people

Source: compiled by the authors based on [17].

As can be seen, over the 23 years of independence, the number of Kyrgyz citizens identifying themselves as

Kyrgyz has increased by 72% – from 3.1 million to almost 5.5 million. It is noteworthy that during the census, the ethnicity of citizens was recorded according to the words of the respondents, i.e. the data presented are solely self-identified by the respondents. This positive trend is indicative of the growing self-awareness in modern Kyrgyz society. For a more complete assessment of the trend in the number of Kyrgyz by year, it is also necessary to compare the information obtained with the data of several other censuses conducted under Soviet rule and available in the archives of the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (Figure 2).

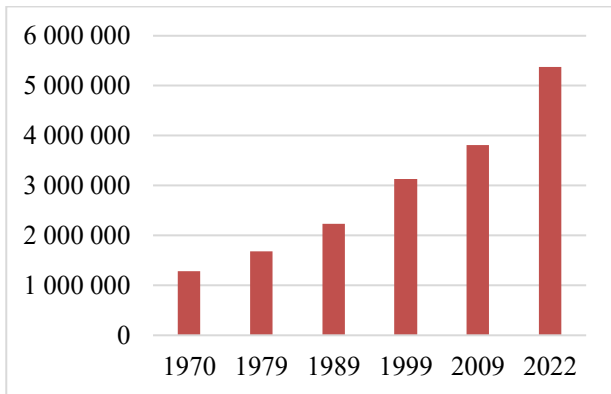


Figure 2. Changes in the number of Kyrgyz by census years

Source: compiled by the authors based on [17].

The longer period taken for the study only confirms the dynamics of recent times and proves that the processes

taking place in the ethnic composition of the Kyrgyz Republic are not accidental. Another crucial indicator of the formation of a nation is the issue of linguistic identification, i.e. what language a person calls native language. Out of the 5,379,020 Kyrgyz who took part in the 2022 national census, 5,360,056 people said Kyrgyz was their native language, which is an absolute majority. Uzbeks, who numbered 986,881 people in the country, named Uzbek (868,730) and Kyrgyz (113,385) as their native languages. The third largest ethnic group, the Russians, who numbered 282,777 people, predominantly named Russian as their native language. It is noteworthy that the proportion of citizens who speak Kyrgyz as their native language is much higher among Uzbeks (13%) than among ethnic Russians (6%). The distribution of the population by second language proficiency, according to the 2022 census, showed that Russian is extremely popular outside its ethnic group – more than 3 million people. Given that Russian still has the status of official language in Kyrgyzstan, this statistic is quite expected, but at the same time, it is worrying – such a cultural trace of the former metropolis is fraught with a decline or even loss of sovereignty in the future.

Lastly, by studying the formation of civic identity in the Kyrgyz Republic in the context of the level of knowledge of the two main languages – the state and the official one – it is possible to compare the degree of proficiency in them. Visualisations of these indicators by five levels of proficiency (“fluent”, “good”, “sufficiently”, “poor”, “do not know”) are shown in Figure 3 (for Kyrgyz) and Figure 4 (for Russian).

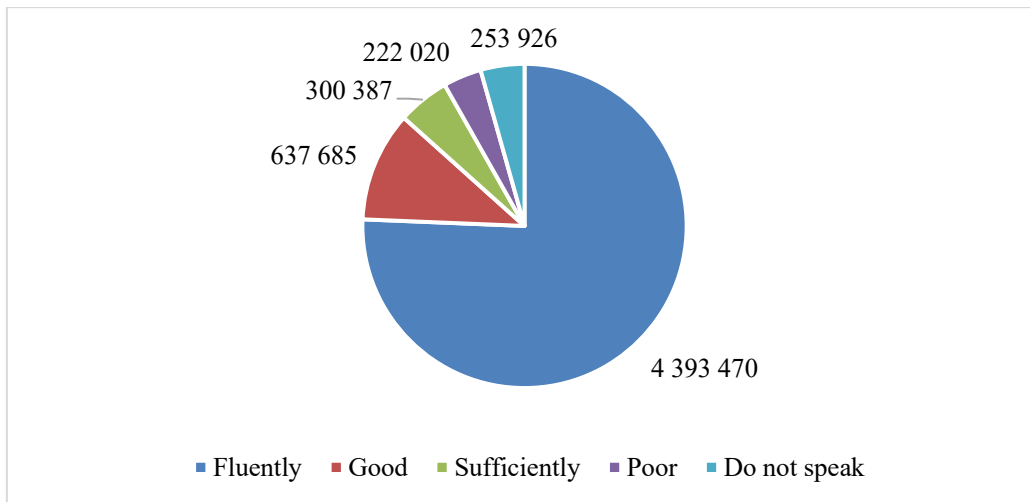


Figure 3. Level of knowledge of the Kyrgyz language in the Kyrgyz Republic

Source: compiled by the authors based on [17].

According to the data, at least three-quarters of the national population rate their knowledge of the state language as the highest.

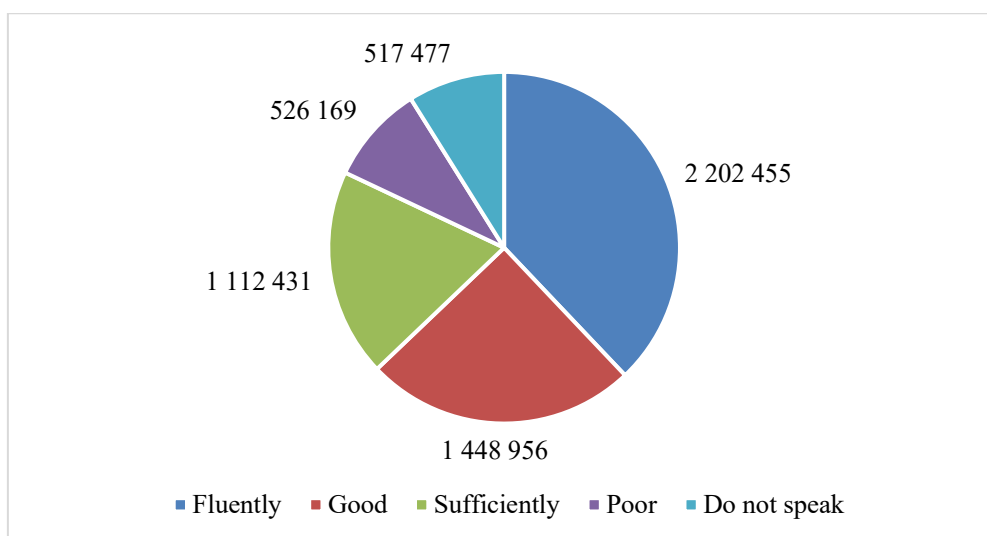


Figure 4. The level of Russian language proficiency in the Kyrgyz Republic

Source: compiled by the authors based on [17].

Although Russian is still an official language in the country, only a third of the population is fluent in it. In the future, a further decline in this metric will signal the growth of Kyrgyz national consciousness and their desire to finally break all ties with the former empire. In this context, the semantic phenomenon of the gradual “Russification” of the Kyrgyz language is of great importance, when words and, as a result, meanings are being replaced at both the domestic and official levels. Often, most public speeches consist of an alternation of indigenous Kyrgyz and Russian words, the use of which is more familiar and convenient for modern Kyrgyz. Even at the sessions of the Jogorku Kenesh, a “mix” is often encountered, in which Russian words are only added to Kyrgyz words with prefixes, endings or conjunctions – for example, “өзүнүн служебный полномочиясынан злоупотреблять эткендиги үчүн”. In addition, during the Russian and then Soviet empires, many words of foreign origin found their way into the Kyrgyz language through Russian. This affected their phonetics and spelling and made such terms “Russian” by default, regardless of their actual country of origin.

This situation, despite its harmless and everyday nature, is a manifestation of meaningful cultural expansion and has a negative impact on the formation of Kyrgyz civic identity. Foreign films and computer games translated into Russian, Russian popular music, TV shows, entertainment print media, social networks such as Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki – all of this is a manifestation of the soft power of the former metropolis, undermining the identity and sovereignty of the Kyrgyz ethnic group. The state authorities need to address this negative trend and launch programmes to promote the native language in Kyrgyzstan. Similar to the “slow” Russian expansion, they should not be official or circular – it would be much more effective to involve youth opinion leaders, popular bloggers, and showmen who speak pure Kyrgyz as a matter of principle. The growth of the unofficial popularity of the native language, the “fashion” for it, will significantly increase the level of civic consciousness in the country and help to finally get rid of the imperial reflections of neighbouring

states. In addition, and from a philological point of view, the development of the mother tongue will significantly expand the linguistic toolkit, increase its practical capabilities, broaden semantic horizons, and fill familiar words with new meanings. Moreover, under the influence of words borrowed from the English language, semantic calquing will take place, which will enrich the Kyrgyz language with new shades, meanings and concepts. Such a direct connection with other foreign languages, without the “mediation” of Russian, will open new, inherent opportunities for Kyrgyz hermeneutics to interpret and interpret neologisms that appear in the modern English-speaking space every day.

A characteristic marker of the times is the initiative of the Kyrgyz authorities to use AI and other modern technologies to promote the native language. For example, in 2023, the government of the Kyrgyz Republic allocated 140,000 USD for the purchase of an NVIDIA supercomputer, whose main function is to develop the Kyrgyz language [18]. Using this equipment, the National Commission for the State Language and Language Policy, in cooperation with Ulut Soft programmers, is developing and implementing AI capable of processing text and audio information in the Kyrgyz language. In addition, the company plans to create a speech synthesiser that will reduce the exchange of information between a gadget and a human to a traditional dialogue.

At the same time, there are non-governmental projects initiated by civil society enthusiasts – Kyrgyz people who want to raise the status of their native language in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Akylai project is an analogue of the well-known ChatGPT AI tool but in the Kyrgyz language. On the one hand, the spoken name can be deciphered as a combination of the Kyrgyz word “акыл” (“mind”) and “AI”, and on the other hand, it refers to a traditional Kyrgyz female name. According to the developers, Akylai already knows more than 5 million Kyrgyz words and has several thousand subscribers. The Kyrgyz chat, like its better-known counterpart, can conduct a dialogue, select and process the necessary information, and navigate in context. In the near future, it is worth developing an algorithm for

robotic teaching of the Kyrgyz language to anyone online. An important feature of the project is that it will be transferred to an open-source format in the future when all interested enthusiasts will be able not only to use the results of the AkylAI project but also to participate in its improvement, training and development.

Another important factor in civic self-identification is ethnicity. At the same time, historically, this parameter has been the source of many contradictions, often escalating into conflicts. In Kyrgyzstan, the history of inter-ethnic relations is complicated, and at different stages of history, controversies have affected different ethnic groups. For example, in late January 2007, clashes between Dungans and Kyrgyz took place in the village of Iskra in the Chui District, destroying more than 30 houses and the displacement of about 70 Dungan families. In April 2009, another ethnic conflict took place, involving both Kyrgyz and Kurds. In this case, 80 people were injured and 15 houses were pogromed. In 2010, mass riots took place in the village of Mayevka on the outskirts of Bishkek under the pretext of seizing arable land belonging to Meskhetian Turks. As a result of the conflict, 4 people died, 11 houses were set on fire, and 850 hectares of arable land were seized.

However, the most significant and high-profile event was the conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in June 2010 in the border city of Osh. As a result of the unrest, which lasted several days, more than 400 people were killed and 1,800 residential buildings were destroyed, according to official figures alone. About one hundred thousand ethnic Uzbeks were forced to leave their homes and flee to Uzbekistan for fear of persecution [13]. In each of these cases, the state took the necessary measures, the perpetrators were punished and the IDPs returned home, but the more appropriate strategy in this case is not to remedy the consequences, but to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts and prevent manifestations of inter-ethnic discord. For this purpose, the Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy and Cooperation with Civil Society was established in the Office of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. The powers and responsibilities of this body include monitoring inter-ethnic relations in the country and implementing ethnic development policy, primarily in the border areas.

The policy of the leading educational institutions of Kyrgyzstan, in particular the International University named after K. Sh. Toktomamatov, is also based on the principles of tolerance and national tolerance. Over the three decades of its existence, the university has proved its commitment to such values as academic and social responsibility and has provided an inclusive environment for students, their parents and teachers. While emphasising the importance of civic identity, the university does not attach importance to student's nationality, gender, religion and other factors unrelated to the learning process. According to the Mission and quality policy of the International University named after K.Sh. Toktomamatov [19], the university is based on the principles of modernity, transparency and openness, as well as continuity and continuity of education and science. Due to their representativeness and ability to reflect the opinion of the new generation of Kyrgyzstan residents, students at the International University named after K. Sh.

Toktomamatov were chosen as respondents of the survey. In the course of the survey, 150 third-year students of various specialities were successfully interviewed. Each respondent was asked to answer three open-ended questions: "What is your national identity?"; "What is the most important intangible value of the Kyrgyz people?"; "Which state, in your opinion, poses the greatest threat to the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz Republic?".

In response to the first question, 122 students (i.e. 81% of respondents) identified themselves as Kyrgyz, 24 people (16%) identified themselves as Uzbeks, 2 as Russians and 2 as Tajiks (Table 1). This ratio differs slightly from the overall ethnic sample for the country reflected in the 2022 census, but in general, a significant numerical advantage of the titular nation is confirmed.

Table 1. National identity of respondents

National identity	Number of people
Kyrgyz	122
Uzbeks	24
Russians	2
Tajiks	2

Source: compiled by the authors.

In answers to the next question, "What is the most significant intangible value of the Kyrgyz people?", great variability of answers was recorded, reflecting a high level of knowledge of native culture among students at International University named after K. Sh. Toktomamatov (Table 2). The most popular answers were the heroic folk epic Manas (52%), the Kyrgyz language (19%), the work of the Akyuns (17%), and a yurt or tunduk (9%). Another 4 responses (3%) contained less popular symbols – the national flag, steppe, kyz kuumay and kumys (each with one vote).

Table 2. Respondent opinions on the greatest intangible value

The greatest intangible value	Number of people
Manas	78
Kyrgyz language	29
The creativity of the Aksyns	25
Yurt	8
Tunduk	6
State flag	1
Steppe	1
Kyz Kuumay	1
Kumys	1

Source: compiled by the authors.

The results of this survey confirm the hypothesis that it is the national language and its semantics that are primarily a form factor for national identification – in one capacity or another, 88% of young people recognised the importance of the Kyrgyz language as the highest material value of the nation.

Finally, the student responses to the final question, "Which state, in your opinion, poses the greatest threat to the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz Republic?", was distributed

as follows: 36% (54 people) believe that China could be a potential aggressor, 34% (51 people) see the danger from Uzbekistan, and 30% (45 people) consider Russian actions to be the greatest threat (Table 3).

Table 3. Opinions of respondents regarding the greatest external threat

The biggest threat	Number of people
China	54
Uzbekistan	51
Russia	45

Source: compiled by the authors.

Notably, among the three most likely violators of Kyrgyzstan sovereignty, one of them does not even share common borders with Kyrgyzstan, but its aggressive behaviour in the international arena in the XXI century necessitates to address such risks.

Summing up the empirical research, it is possible to conclude that the level of national consciousness and civic identity of young people in Kyrgyzstan is quite high. The new elite of the nation is overwhelmingly devoid of the cosmopolitan illusions of the older generation, knows its history, respects its language and is aware of the risks emanating from the former metropolis. To strengthen the position of ethnic Kyrgyz within the country and increase the importance of the state in the international arena, the Kyrgyz Republic needs to continue its systematic distancing from dictatorial regimes and support the aspirations of the younger generation to develop a Kyrgyz identity.

Discussion

The data obtained from the study can be used to assess current trends in the development of civic identity and compare them with the results of other researchers. For instance, F. Fukuyama [20] defined identity, on the one hand, as a desire for recognition, and, on the other hand, as an opportunity to increase security by being near with people with similar values. According to the author, identity is based on the recognition of the legitimacy of the current political system of the country (regardless of the degree of its democracy), but at higher levels of identification, personal and family factors are involved. In other words, civic identity can be imposed by official laws, and rules of teaching language and history in schools, but national identity is based on cultural codes and values. This thesis has been confirmed in this paper: despite decades of being part of various empires, the people of Kyrgyzstan have not lost their identity and the number of people identifying themselves as Kyrgyz has been steadily increasing over the years.

V. Hösle [21] addressed the crisis of individual and collective identity – according to the observations, there is a differentiation between formal and real identity, and the latter is peculiar only to empirical objects. According to the author, only real identity can be subject to crisis – when the essence consists in the rejection of the self by the “I”. As it was revealed in the process of this work – it was through the crisis of identity, reflected in the population censuses by the dynamics of the ratio of ethnicities, that many

Kyrgyz had to go through after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Instead of the imposed artificial Soviet identity, every citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic faced the question “Who am I?” and, judging by the changes in the indicators above, more and more Kyrgyz supported independent development.

The issue of national and civic identity has been raised in several studies concerning different countries and ethnic groups. Both D.C. Krutsinger et al. [22], studying the peculiarities of identification of US residents, and H.K. Peterlini [23], using the example of the traditions of civic engagement in Italy, confirm in their works that the desire of the community to preserve its identity, not to dissolve in imposed meanings, is basic for any ethnic group. This observation, but on the example of the inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan, has been repeatedly confirmed in this work. An important marker of the people desire to defend their identity is the growth of consciousness and political activity – the willingness to choose a political asset and, thus, a further vector of development. In addition to social relevance, this ability of citizens, according to D. Karagöz and M. Uysal [24], also affects ordinary household satisfaction, as a multisample of two experiences demonstrated that self-identification shows a positive relationship with the constructs of experience of involvement, affective attachment, and satisfaction.

The need to return to a full-fledged Kyrgyz language, to eradicate Russian counterparts and phonetic substitutions, proved in this study, has, in addition to ideological, also semantic underpinnings. The synonymy of the Russian language often narrows the meanings – for example, the difference between the concepts of “identity” and “identity” cannot be unambiguously compared to the subjects of research by M. Heidegger [25] in “Identity and Differentiation” and F. Schelling [26] in “The Philosophy of Identity”. At the same time, a direct translation from German into Kyrgyz would exclude the ambiguity of the interpretation of the concept. Moreover, as an example, it is worth noting the scientific, theoretical and practical work that neighbouring China is doing to develop, support, protect and disseminate the language of its titular nation. Regular updating of the vocabulary base, and modern adaptation of word formation, which can be observed in studies of G. Kong et al. [27] and G. Xu et al. [28] should become a guideline for the relevant agencies of Kyrgyzstan to implement a balanced language policy concerning the mother tongue.

In more detail, when considering the methods of popularising the Kyrgyz self-identity discussed above, we should also refer to the treatise “Homo ludens” by the Dutch historian and cultural critic J. Huizinga [29]. According to the theory, play is an innate human need, and it can often achieve more from a subject than coercion or imposition. Accordingly, the media activities proposed in this paper aimed at encouraging the population to switch to their native language (bloggers, television shows, cultural events) should also be supplemented by various game programmes in which viewers and participants will improve the purity of their language. Moreover, among the identifiers of a nationality and citizenship, language occupies an important but not the only place. The peculiarities of the political culture of the modern Kyrgyz people are also largely determining factors. B.M.

Torogeldieva [30] noted that at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries, the political culture of the Kyrgyz Republic was at a bifurcation point, having, on the one hand, historically established patriarchal and subject traditions, and, on the other hand, a nascent system of democratic values that had yet to be introduced into the minds of Kyrgyz citizens. As the results of this study have shown, at this stage, a participatory type of political culture has been formed in the country and modern youth is not ready to give up participation in the national governance.

The inter-ethnic conflicts listed in this paper are a negative legacy of the past and have a significant impact on the country perception in the international arena. Studying this issue, R.D. Kanayama [31] added to the list of Kyrgyzstan problems on ethnic grounds by the fighting on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in September 2022 on the eve of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) summit in Samarkand. The conflict, which has been going on for more than twenty years with varying degrees of intensity, is caused by competition for water resources in the Ferghana Valley. Indeed, this “hotspot” should also be included in the conditional list of problems and its solution should be worked out in close cooperation with the Tajik authorities. The problems of relations with another neighbour of the Kyrgyz Republic – China – were studied by T. Gerber and Q. He [32], which echoes the results of the above survey, according to which more than a third of Kyrgyz students see this country as a threat. Sinophobia, which has received an additional impetus from the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying quarantine restrictions, should not replace civic identity, and the task of the authorities of the Kyrgyz Republic and all countries of the Central Asian region is to communicate with the population accordingly.

An unusual view of interethnic relations in the Kyrgyz Republic was made by K.W. Estes [33]. Through statistical analysis with a large sample, the author proves that titular ethnic Kyrgyz have an advantage in obtaining various benefits through informal networks. On the one hand, this kind of “compatriotism” is also a relic of the past, but on the other hand, it helps to cement and form a civic identity, the importance of which has been demonstrated in this paper. The solution to the problem of ethnic favouritism in the provision of resources could be to control the exclusion of this factor, at least in the public sectors of the economy. Several Western authors consider Kyrgyzstan to be a leader in democratic freedoms among all Central Asian countries, and this also manifests a special national identity.

D. Siegel [34], for instance, noted the achievements of political decentralisation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the success of communication between the people and the authorities. After conducting a ten-month field study in the Kyrgyz Republic, the American scholar interpreted the national identity of Kyrgyz as a more developed sense of justice, readiness to defend their values and a desire for independence. A group of other foreign researchers, S. Kumar Biswal and R. Pradhan [35], in turn, examined the main causes of the past political unrest, the history of Kyrgyzstan transition to parliamentary democracy, and ways of further development of the political elite. According to the authors, the growth of civic consciousness and national identity allows society to

successfully resist reactionary attempts to return the country to an authoritarian path. The growth of internal freedom and the desire for democratic values of the free world in Kyrgyzstan were also noted in this paper.

As noted earlier in this study, the formation of Kyrgyz national identity began long before the state was established within its current borders – at the stage of the nation birth in the Yenisei and Altai regions. This genesis is proved, among other things, by the semantics of language. N. Satylkanova [36] determined a significant number of Mongolian loanwords in the Kyrgyz-Kipchak group of Turkic languages, most of which date back to the Early Yenisei period. As noted, strong labial harmony of vowels in the Kyrgyz language could influence the structure of long vowels in Mongolian loanwords, which formed their unique pronunciation. When discussing the Kyrgyz language, one cannot fail to mention *Manas*, a thousand-year-old epic that the majority of respondents to this survey called the most important intangible value of the nation. As noted by the Indian Researcher N. Singh [37], *Manas* is 2.5 times the length of the classical Indian epic *Mahabharata*, and the spiritual values mentioned in the ancient work have been shaping Kyrgyz identity for centuries.

In general, the construction of a system of national and civic self-identification can take different forms and use different methods. In the context of modern technologies, including marketing, the concept of national branding is often mentioned. A. Polese and A. Sheranova [38] conducted a comparative analysis of the processes of identity building in Kyrgyzstan and Estonia. The authors saw similarities between the two countries, which are quite distant from each other, in that initially the main task of national governments was to rebrand the country for an international audience, and the growth of national identity was an additional effect. At the same time, the authors argued that efforts to form an external image would still be in vain if the local population did not imbue the idea of national identity [39].

Thus, the formation and development of national identity is a complex and multifactorial process, but the people of Kyrgyzstan, having formed as a nation, successfully fulfilled this task.

Conclusions

The present study has identified current trends in the formation of civic identity in Kyrgyzstan, both from the perspective of past centuries and in the context of the modern technological order. The key stages of the Kyrgyz ethnic origin, the factors that influenced the final ethnogenesis and the emergence of the national language, as well as examples of complex inter-ethnic relations and conflicts were briefly outlined.

The analysis of three population censuses – in 1999, 2009 and 2022 – identified key trends, the ethnic composition of the country, as well as the quantitative dynamics of the population of the three predominant nationalities – Kyrgyz, Russians and Uzbeks. A separate assessment was made of the distribution of the population by native language proficiency and the language the respondent calls their second language. In addition, segmental diagrams were drawn up by the degree of proficiency in the state (Kyrgyz) and official (Russian)

languages, which revealed that while almost 90% of the population is fluent or proficient in Kyrgyz, only about 60% are fluent in Russian. This figure as of 2023 indicates a decline in the role of the “official” language and, accordingly, a growing Kyrgyz identity.

The study revealed the problem of the “russification” of the Kyrgyz language, since in everyday life, and even at the level of government agencies, many people find it easier to use Russian words by adding Kyrgyz prefixes, endings or unions. Moreover, due to the long-term negative influence of imperial narratives, many modern foreign words have Russian semantics and pronunciation. Accordingly, to fully restore national identity in the Kyrgyz Republic, it is necessary to eliminate this mediation and rethink the vocabulary of the modern Kyrgyz language by directly calibrating the semantic meaning of borrowed words.

The survey conducted as part of the research among students of the International University named after K.Sh. Toktomamatov showed that the level of national

consciousness among young people is quite high, students, for the most part, know the fundamental national symbols and are aware of the current geopolitical situation. A more detailed study of inter-ethnic relations among respondents was limited by the policy of the International University named after K.Sh. Toktomamatov in the field of equality of nationalities, genders and religions.

As a result of the analysis of all the information received, recommendations were formulated to promote the modern Kyrgyz language and form a “fashion” for it. The development of a detailed communication strategy with the involvement of modern mass media could be the subject of the next study.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Формування громадянської ідентичності Киргизстану: семантичний феномен і міжетнічні відносини

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Анотація

Актуальність. Складна геополітична ситуація, спроби реваншу колишніх імперій, тимчасова окупація суверенних територій у центрі Європи – усі ці чинники роблять питання громадянської та національної ідентичності вкрай актуальними, особливо – для громадян колишнього Радянського Союзу.

Мета. Мета цього дослідження – вивчити чинники формування громадянської ідентичності киргизів, зокрема, семантику рідної мови та відносини із сусідніми етносами.

Методологія. Для досягнення цієї мети було проведено емпіричне дослідження, що включає опитування представників молодого покоління.

Результати. У результаті роботи було виявлено позитивну динаміку національної киргизької самоідентичності за роки незалежності з 3,1 млн осіб у 1999 році до 5,5 млн осіб у 2022 році. Також зростання національної свідомості проявилось в мовній ідентифікації – дедалі більше громадян володіє киргизькою мовою “вільно” (76%) або “добре” (11%), а вплив російської мови, навпаки, знижується. Водночас було виявлено загрозу чистоті киргизької мови через велику кількість слів іноземного походження, запозичених через російську семантику. У процесі дослідження було сформовано рекомендації щодо підвищення престижності використання в побуті киргизької мови та її споконвічних слів. У процесі анкетування, проведеного серед студентів третіх курсів Міжнародного університету імені К.Ш. Токтомаматова, було виявлено основні атрибути національної спадщини, популярні серед молоді, та актуальне бачення геополітичних загроз державності Киргизстану. Окремо було проведено аналіз інноваційних інструментів, що сприяють розвитку національної ідентичності в країні.

Висновки. Дослідження виявляє зростаючу киргизьку ідентичність у Киргизстані, про що свідчить підвищення рівня володіння киргизькою мовою та національної свідомості серед молоді, водночас висвітлюючи такі виклики, як “русифікація” мови та потреба у стратегіях сприяння сучасному використанню киргизької мови.

Ключові слова: національна ідентичність; рідна мова; нематеріальна спадщина; самоідентифікація; загроза незалежності; самоідентифікація